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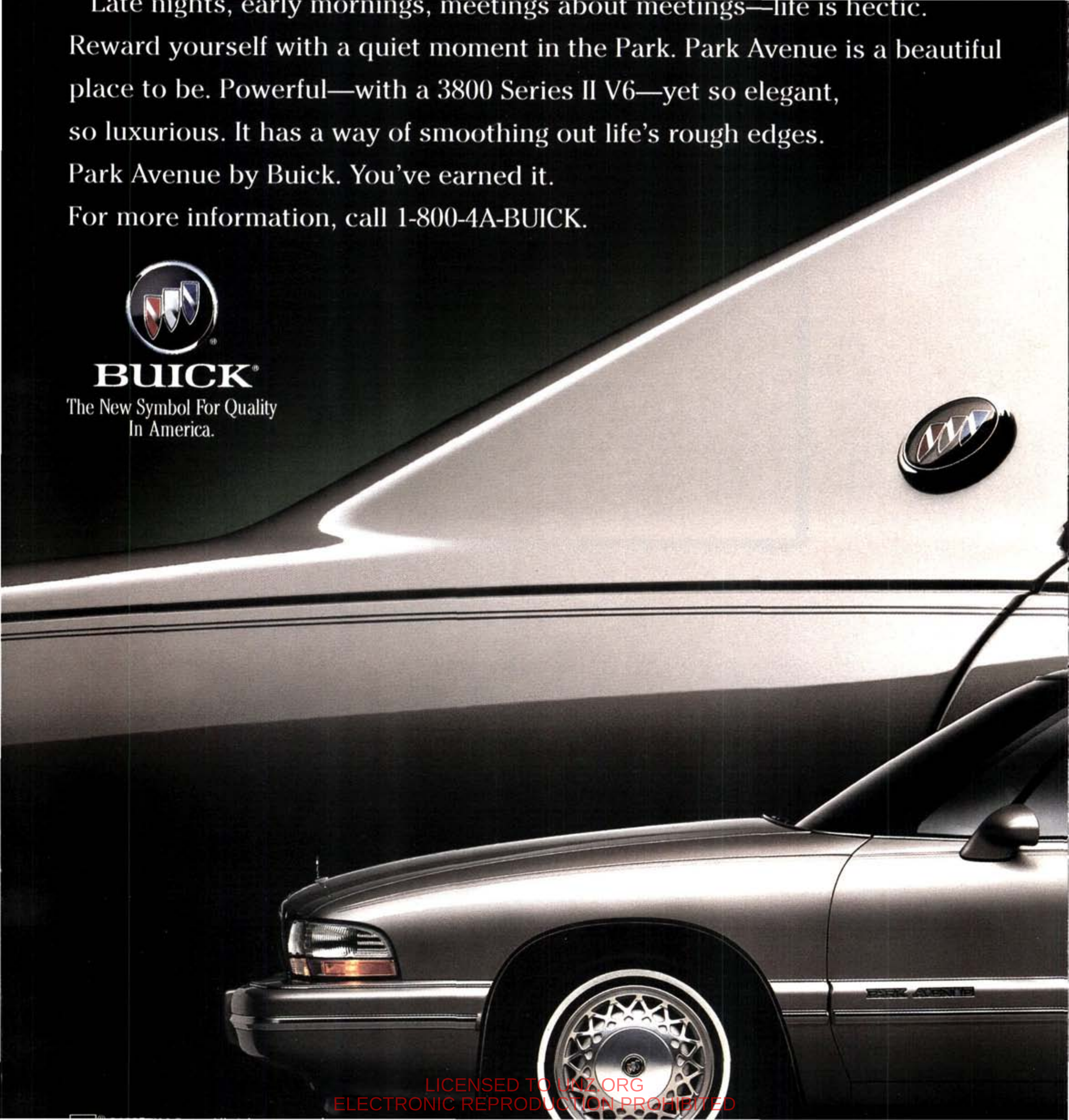

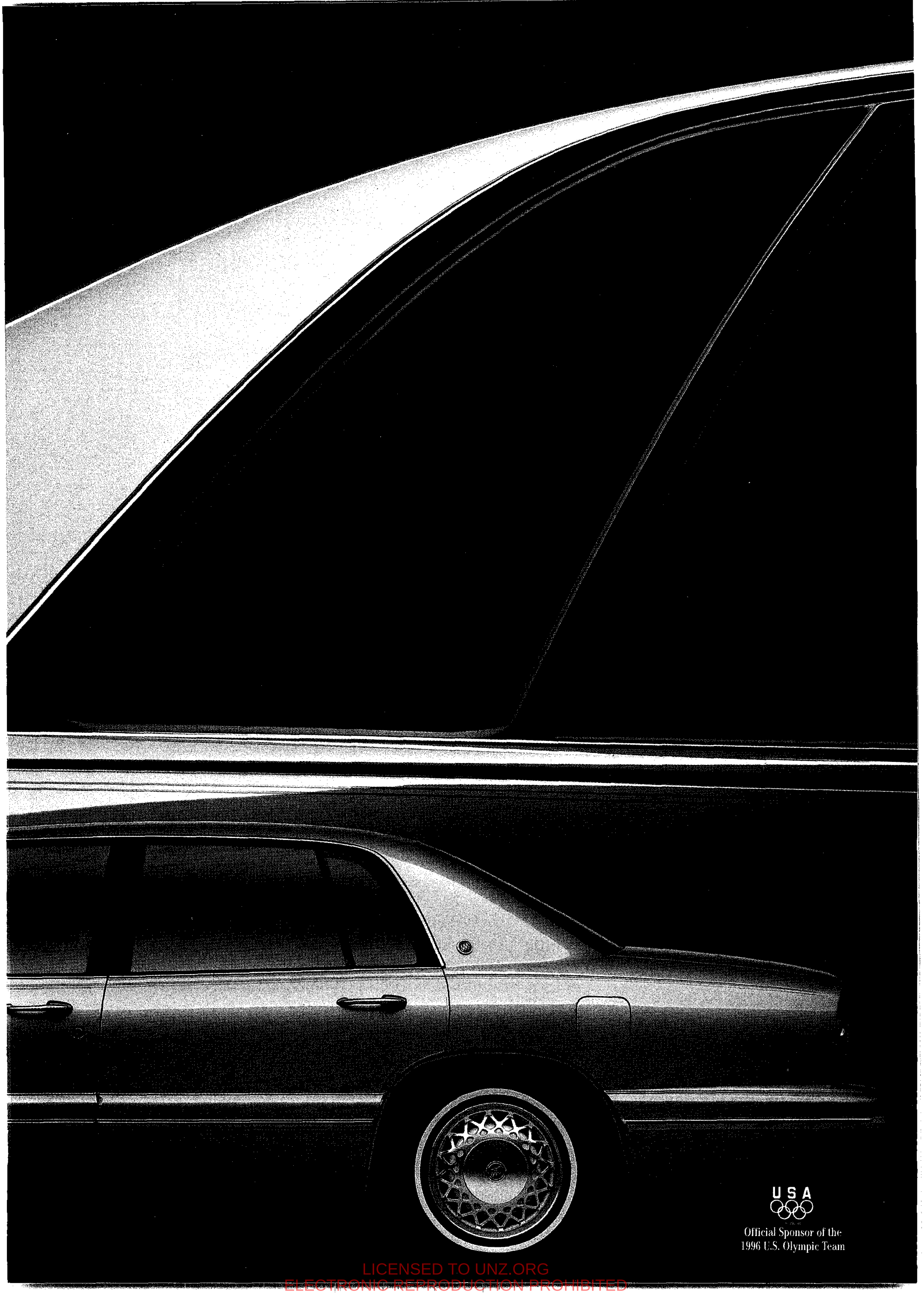
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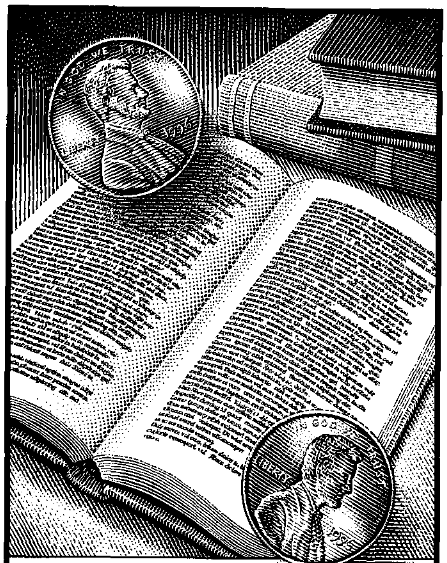

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THE NEW YORKER

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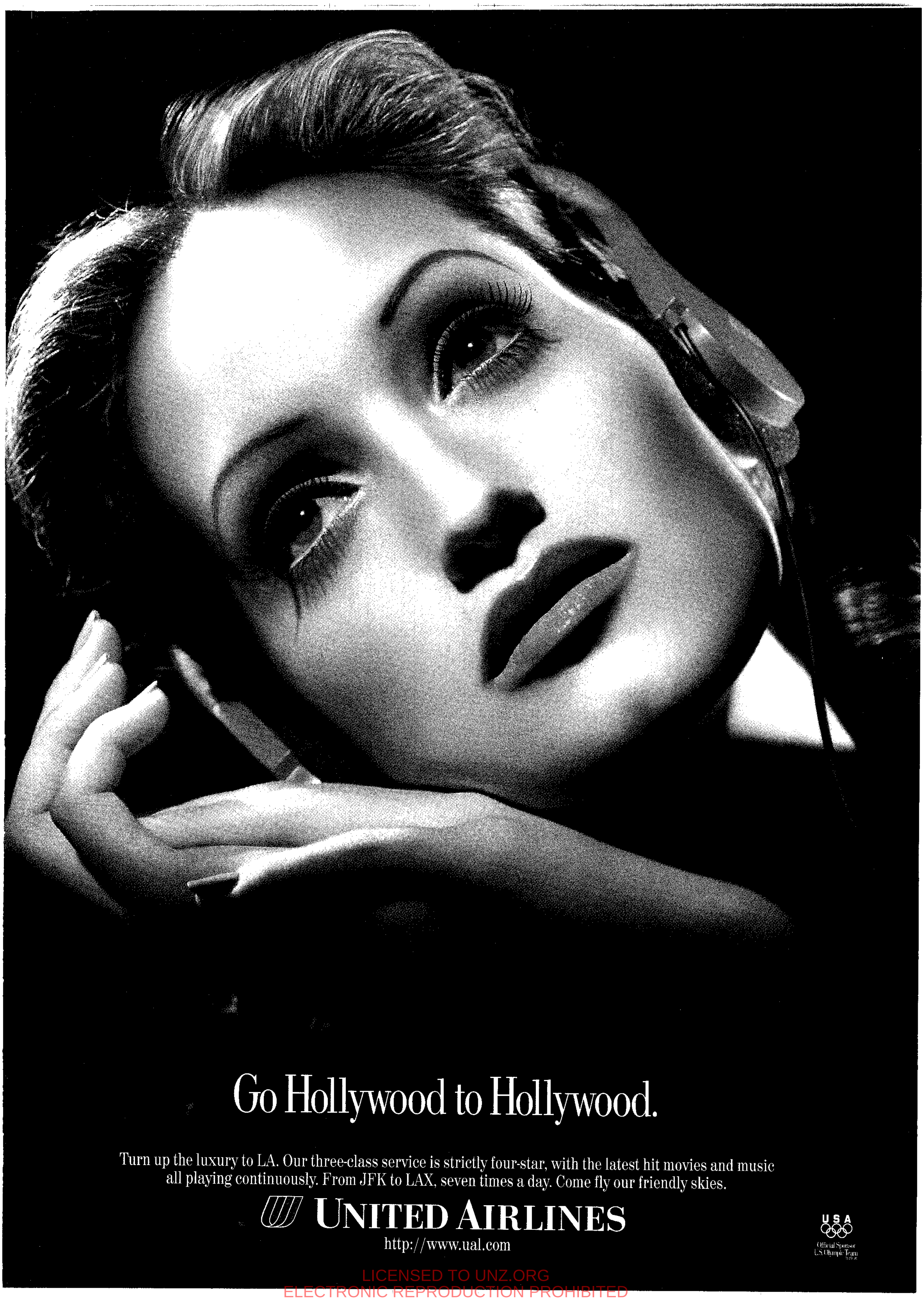

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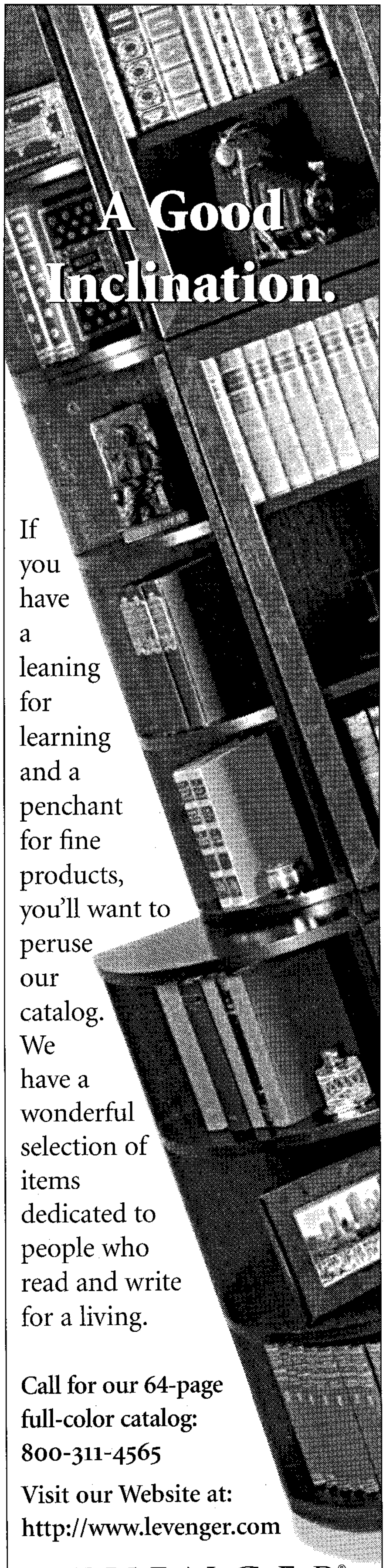

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COMMENT

UNCEREMONY

The conventions will come to order. Too much order.

AUGUST is the month of America's national party conventions, and you can almost feel the excitement ebbing. For never in their long and varied history have the conventions been as unimportant as they are today. The usual explanations for their decline—that they no longer actually choose the candidates, or that television has overwhelmed them—fall a little short. After all, conventions remained alive in the American political imagination for more than a generation after their decisive role in picking candidates ended and network television coverage began, in 1952. Yet for many years after that public interest in them seemed only to grow.

What made political conventions seem significant through most of their recent history was not decisions but argument and ritual. Whether angry or joyous, they were the great pageants of party democracy. They were a grand stage for political debates, even if they seldom resolved them. They launched and ruined political careers. They were the perfervid camp meetings of American partisan politics, and they flourished in an era when most Americans believed that parties and politics mattered.

One reason the conventions seem unimportant today is that party professionals learned, perhaps too well, a lesson of the nineteen-sixties and seventies—that fractious, open brawls make good television but bad electoral strategy. Conventions seem unimportant also because politics has come to seem less important—because growing numbers of Americans have developed such profound skepticism about the process and those who manipulate it that they have ceased to take it seriously. The fading of the national conventions is one of the most striking symbols of our national political malaise.

Those who mounted the first party conventions, more than a century and a half ago, saw their work as a great democratic reform. In the infant American republic, Presidential candidates had been chosen by party caucuses in Congress—closed, clubby groups that many citizens considered corrupt and undemocratic. Then, in 1824, Andrew Jackson and his followers in the Democratic Party—who considered themselves outsiders challenging the Eastern élite—rose up against "King Caucus" and effectively destroyed it. In its place, the Party settled, eventually, on the idea of a national convention—an idea derived from the revered constitutional conventions that had created the structures of American government. A con-

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vention, its defenders assumed, would be a great conclave of the people. It would enable ordinary citizens, not just officeholders or political leaders, to shape a party's decisions. In 1832, the Democrats held a convention for the first time, in Baltimore, and nominated President Jackson, the champion of "people's democracy," for a second term. Their Whig opponents held one, too, and the major parties have been convening quadrennially ever since.

It was not long before the convention system began to take on some of the same unpopular characteristics as the caucus system it had replaced. In practice, few delegates were "ordinary citizens." Instead, in one state after another, party bosses seized control of their delegations. On occasion, a convention could spin out of the control of party leaders in the face of popular passions—as the 1896 Democratic Convention famously did, when a thirty-six-year-old Nebraska congressman named William Jennings Bryan electrified the delegates with his "Cross of Gold" speech and went on to win the nomination. For the most part, however, conventions deserved their reputation as vehicles of "boss rule," and that reputation inspired the rise of the primary system early in this century. Over time, the primaries stripped the power of nominating candidates from party bosses and returned it—in theory, at least—to the rank and file. By 1932, when Franklin D. Roosevelt shattered tradition by accepting the nomination in person (with a radio speech promising the nation a "new deal"), conventions were coming to be less about decision-making than about image-making.

After the mid-fifties, conventions lost the last vestiges of their role in choosing candidates, and gradually assumed their modern form as elaborate television spectacles. Now something new was at stake: access to the airwaves. By the time the delegates gathered, everyone might know the identity of the nominee—as everyone knew that the Republicans would nominate Goldwater in '64 and Ford in '76, and that the Democrats would nominate Humphrey in '68 and McGovern in '72—but divisions in the parties and the country were too deep to hide. Party leaders fought to control the proceedings, to keep conflict and dissent out of sight and off the air, but, since reporters were eager for stories, and convention proceedings remained relatively loose, division and dissent kept spilling into the hall, onto the screen, and even—as in Chicago in 1968—into the streets.

It won't be that way in San Diego or in Chicago this month. *Something* interesting will probably happen: when thousands of human beings gather in one place, that can hardly be helped. But the ceremonies themselves will be dismayingly empty. Individuals have always used ceremonies to mark significant passages in their lives—christenings, bar mitzvahs, graduations, weddings, funerals. Nations need ceremonies, too. But ceremonies are useful, to individuals or to a society, only when the people who participate in them believe in them. They must have meaning. And political conventions are in danger of losing theirs.

Conventions have rarely been genuine forums of deliberative democracy. They have often been boring and have sometimes been ridiculous. Through most of their long history, though, there has been at their core a broad assumption—widely shared by both participants and observers—that the democratic process was something of weight and value. There was an exhilarating, even a liberating, quality to the often absurd ceremonies through which Americans anointed their leaders, expressed their enthusiasms, and vented their grievances.

Conventions are among the best vehicles Americans have had for celebrating the process of politics and making it seem an activity worthy of attention and concern. They are the only occasions that give our atrophying political parties a sense of identity and purpose. They are among our most conspicuous national civic institutions. In a time when people across the political spectrum decry the decline of "civic life," the slow slide of conventions into irrelevance is not the principal problem facing our degraded public life, and their restoration might not do much to repair things. But in an age in which government, politicians, and even politics itself have become objects of indifference and contempt, the transformation of these once boisterous, vibrant, exuberant, contentious rituals into slick, shiny infomercials almost indistinguishable from the many other packaged, artificial "events" that populate our culture is something to lament.

—ALAN BRINKLEY

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IN THE MAIL

THE STATE OF FICTION

The argument in the fiction issue over the value, danger, and insignificance of the novel ("In Defense of the Novel, Yet Again," by Salman Rushdie; June 24th and July 1st) is perhaps best refuted by Jane Austen, who has a character in "Northanger Abbey" say, "Oh! it is only a novel! . . . Or, in short, only some work in which . . . the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language."

LEAH JESSE
Simpsonville, S.C.

The letters between Ernest Hemingway and Maxwell Perkins ("Three Words") recall a similar incident, which occurred some thirty years later, concerning John Cheever's "The Wapshot Chronicle." In 1957, I was editing Cheever's book at Harper and received a call from Ralph Thompson, the chief editor of the Book-of-the-Month Club. He informed me that the club had chosen "The Wapshot Chronicle" as a main selection, and I was thrilled, since this was Cheever's first novel after twenty-seven years of short stories. The club, however, insisted that Cheever remove the word "fuck" from a bedroom scene in the novel, as it had never sent its members a book containing that word. I told Thompson that I was quite sure Cheever would say no, and that I'd agree with him. When I asked Cheever, he said, "Oh, no, that's the only word for that scene." I passed this on to Thompson. Shortly thereafter, he called to tell me that for the first time in history a Book-of-the-Month Club selection would go out with that word in it.

SIMON MICHAEL BESSIE
Lyme, Conn.

I met Jorge Luis Borges when he spoke to an overflow audience at U.C.L.A., offering one of his *charlas*, as Alastair Reid calls his set-piece interviews (Personal History, "Neruda and Borges"). Borges spoke in English, addressing in fascinating, ironic, and allusive detail the list of topics proposed by his interlocutor. This was in the mid-nineteen-seventies, a decade or so before he died. It was an extraordinary evening, not least of all because of its conclusion. The usual question period had been arranged, but attacks came from a number of Latino militants. One young man stood and shouted, "Señor Borges, you should go home! You have nothing to say to us! You never had anything to say to us! You are a disgrace to the people of Argentina and to the Spanish language! You are a dead bourgeois! You are a dodo! You are worthless! You have always been worthless! No one in Latin America reads you! Now, what have you to say to that?" The man flashed a triumphant grin as people listened and nodded approval at his tirade.

Borges calmly lifted his blind face and smiled sweetly at this would-be tormentor. Then, for the first time, he spoke in Spanish, three brief sentences: "I am not a socialist. I am not a Catholic. I am a writer." Profound silence. The young firebrand looked around with his mouth open, spread his hands in a gesture of bafflement, and sat abruptly. The burst of applause that followed soon developed into an overwhelming ovation for Borges.

JASCHA KESSLER
Professor of English and
Modern Literature, U.C.L.A.
Santa Monica, Calif.

Letters should be as brief as possible, and sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "In the Mail," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. They may be edited for length and clarity.

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

At Odds—A monthlong festival of multimedia performance art by the Peculiar Works Project. Aug. 12-14 at 7: "Be Silent, Be Still," a dance-theatre piece about women in history. The festival continues through Sept. 1. (Vineyard's 26th Street Theatre, 309 E. 26th St. 529-3626, ext. 100.)

Born to Sing!—Singers Lisa Fischer, Tanya Blount, and Stacy Francis, in a new R. & B.-and-gospel musical with book and lyrics by Vy Higginsen and Ken Wydro. Preview on Aug. 7. Opens Aug. 8 at 6:45. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

Howard Crabtree's When Pigs Fly—A cast of five performs more than fifteen musical numbers in a new revue conceived by lyricist and director Mark Waldrop and the late costume designer Howard Crabtree. Music by Dick Gallagher. In previews. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Hughie—Al Pacino stars as the blowhard gambler Erie Smith, in his own staging of Eugene O'Neill's 1941 drama. In previews. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

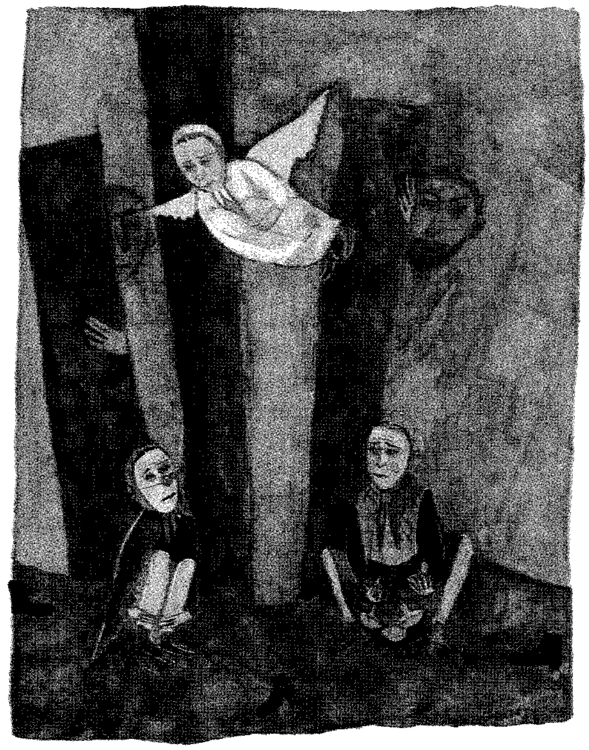
O Wholly Night and Other Jewish Solecisms—A new one-woman play by and with Deb Margolin, in which a woman not unlike the playwright awaits the Messiah. Directed by Margot Lewitin. Previews begin Aug. 12. (Interart, 549 W. 52nd St. 279-4200.)

Possible Worlds—A science-fiction mystery cum love story by John Mighton, in an Adobe Theatre Company production. Previews Aug. 7-9. Opens Aug. 10 at 8 and runs through Sept. 7. (46 Walker St. 560-7387.)

The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol—The London-based Theatre de Complicite presents a brief engagement of its drama about the life and afterlife of a French peasant, based on a short story by John Berger. Simon McBurney is the director. Aug. 7-10 at 8 and Aug. 11 at 3. (Alice Tully Hall, 721-6500.)

Timon of Athens—Michael Cumpsty has the title role in the New York Shakespeare Festival's second summer production, directed by Brian Kulick. In previews. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 539-8750.)

Valley of the Dolls—Theatre-A-Go-Go, from Los Angeles, offers a stage adaptation of the film adaptation of Jacqueline Susann's novel. Opens Aug. 7 at 8 and continues through Sept. 14. (Circle Repertory Company, 159 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)



"The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol," at Lincoln Center.

GISELLE POTTER

OPENED RECENTLY

Acts of Providence—Two one-acts by Edward Allan Baker: "Dead Man's Apartment," a comedy about a man who uses his lunch hour to fight with his mistress, and "Dolores," a drama about two sisters whose lives are affected by domestic violence. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes Aug. 11.)

American Style—Paul Boocock and David Latham have been performing together for three years as Premium Bob, the kind of aggressively intelligent and truly weird act you might have spotted on Letterman in the early eighties. In their new show, they forge a hilarious evening out of elements as incongruous as a writer obsessed with imagining the thoughts of the young Martin Luther and the American public's fascination with cosmetic depilation. Thursdays at 8, through Aug. 15. (Workhouse, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 431-9220.)

The Beckett Festival—Dublin's Gate Theatre is in town to present Samuel Beckett's complete works for the stage—nineteen plays in all—as part of the Lincoln Center Festival 96. Performances continue through Aug. 11. (Lincoln Center. For schedule information and tickets, call 721-6500.)

Big—This adaptation of the movie that starred Tom Hanks and Elizabeth Perkins provides little joy, though Daniel Jenkins, as the twelve-year-old in a grownup's body, is sweet and likable. Directed by Mike Ockrent. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/27/96.) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Boys in the Band—James Lecesne, as the swishy Emory, and David Greenspan, as the lethal Harold, have a field day in Mart Crowley's study of gay self-hatred. The script no longer seems particularly shocking (except in its viciousness) or politically suspect, but it holds up soundly in this impressive revival, which was supervised by the playwright and directed with buckets of bile by Kenneth Elliott. The WPA Theatre production has reopened at the Lucille Lortel for an eleven-week engagement. (121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

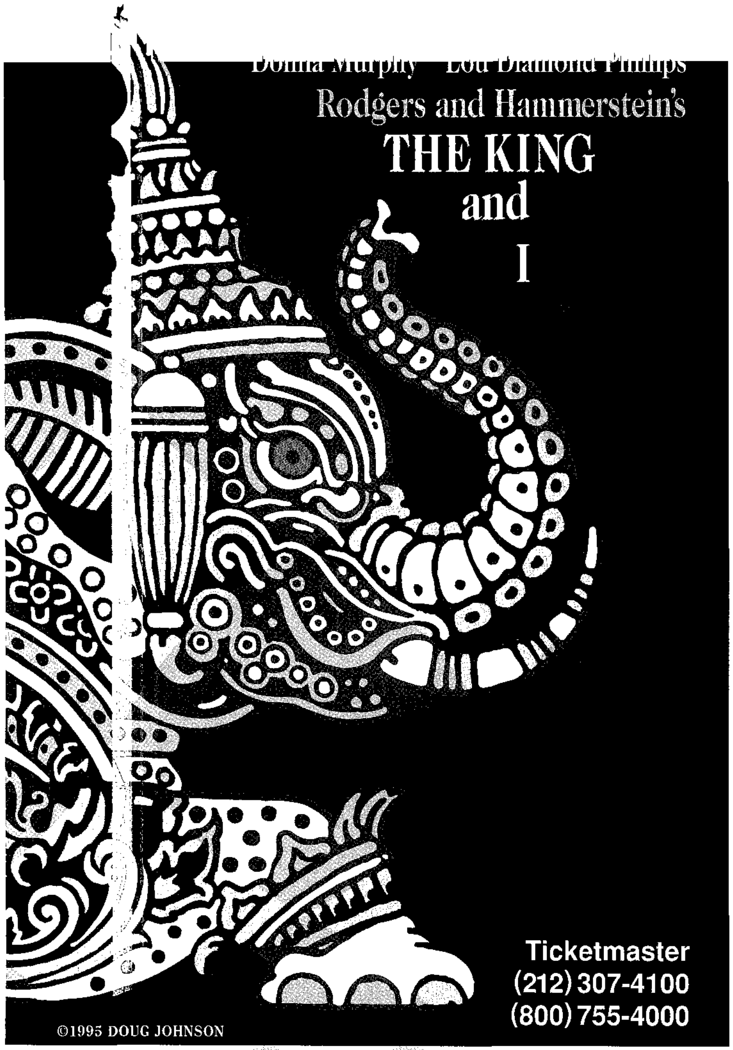
Bring In da Noise, Bring In da Funk—In director George C. Wolfe and dancer-choreographer Savion Glover's heroically energetic musical, the extraordinary Glover and his sensational group of young tap dancers and street drummers bring joy. They bring fury. They bring history and ecstasy. (5/20/96) (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

Chicago City Limits—The improv company takes aim at the 1996 Presidential campaign with a new revue, "Right to Laugh Party." (Chicago City Limits Theatre, First Ave. at 61st St. 888-5233.)

The Cocoanuts—The American Jewish Theatre's production of the Irving Berlin–George S. Kaufman musical (which starred the Marx Brothers in 1925). (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Cowgirls—An appealing, if somewhat predictable, musical comedy, in which three chamber musicians are transformed into fringe-wearin', honky-tonkin' cowgirls. Mary Murfitt, the show's composer and lyricist, and Betsy Howie, who wrote the book, are part of the fine cast. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

Da—In the Irish playwright Hugh Leonard's 1978 memory play, the middle-aged Charlie (Ciaran O'Reilly) reconsiders his tangled relationship with his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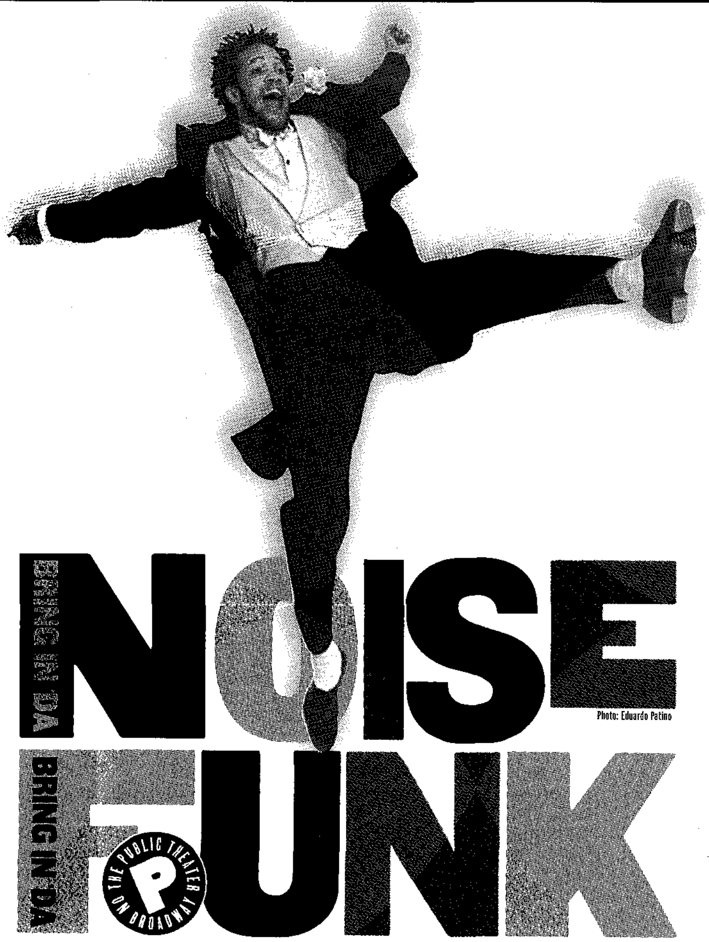
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recently deceased father (Brian Murray), who continues to banter with him from the beyond. Murray gives a typically wonderful performance as the title character, whose blithe approach to life has led both his wife (Aideen O'Kelly) and his son to blame him for their own disappointments. Charlie, speaking to his younger self (played with appealing vulnerability by Malcolm Adams), distills his regret for this into a single line: "It was a long time before I learned that love turned upside down is still love for all that." Charlotte Moore's assured staging doesn't shy away from the sorrow in Leonard's comedy, and the other members of the first-rate cast—Paddy Croft, Julia Gibson, John Leighton, and Paul Mc Grane—shift effortlessly between the past and the present. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

A Delicate Balance—Decorous suburban ennui is transformed into real angst in this bracing, astringent revival of Edward Albee's 1966 play about a family that has sacrificed much of its humanity for the sake of appearances. The cast, under the fine direction of Gerald Gutierrez, is uniformly excellent. (5/27/96) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Forbidden Hollywood—Gerard Alessandrini's hit-and-miss movie-biz sendup. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum—Burt Shevelove, Larry Gelbart, and Stephen Sondheim's 1962 musical-comedy version of a Roman farce is a joke play that begs for outrageousness, but Jerry Zaks's peppy, acrylic revival, with Nathan Lane in the role of Pseudolus, seldom enters that giddy zone of comic daring. (5/20/96) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Getaway—The New Georges summer series of one-acts by emerging female playwrights *continues, Thursdays through Sundays,* through Aug. 18. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202.)

Grace & Glorie—Estelle Parsons plays a ninety-year-old illiterate mountain woman whose last days are interrupted by a well-meaning hospice volunteer (Lucie Arnaz) who has an M.B.A. from Harvard and has moved to Virginia to escape her own tragedy. Tom Ziegler's tale is utterly predictable but charmingly told, and under Gloria Muzio's direction the performances of the two actresses make the blend of humor and pathos affecting rather than cloying. Parsons captures the spirit of the play when she wears makeup for the first time: her smile is a perfect combination of mischievous pleasure at her appearance and serene lack of regret that she hasn't had such benefits before. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 719-9393.)

I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change—A revue tracing the ups and downs of courtship, with book and lyrics by Joe DiPietro and music by Jimmy Roberts. Directed by Joel Bishoff. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

An Ideal Husband—In Oscar Wilde's hundred-and-one-year-old play, a youthful transgression comes back to threaten the career of a promising Cabinet member. The man who saves the day is played, with showy aplomb, by Martin Shaw. The rest of the delightful, mostly British cast, under the direction of Peter Hall, is well up to the Wildean wit and wisdom, and the evening flies by in a flash of epigrammatic splendor. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

Jasper in Gramercy Park—Cordis Heard and James Hallett are (it appears) a long-married couple who are rather obsessed with their dog and his bowel movements. Their talk about him occasionally prompts memories of other events—a near-rape, a drought—which they recall in precise detail. But the playwright, Mary Mitchell, has smothered whatever sense any of this might make by setting the play in, as she describes it, "the present, past, the infinite and the future" and by interspersing her short scenes with increasingly melodramatic film clips of a dog. That Heard and Hallett nonetheless manage to create a portrait of two memorable, charming characters in a loving, if odd, marriage is a testament to their skills. (Phil Bosakowski Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 598-2385.)

The King and I—In a word, magnificent. Hats off to Donna Murphy, as Anna, Lou Diamond Phillips, as the King of Siam, and everyone else (including Rodgers and Hammerstein, of course) who had a hand in this production. Christopher Renshaw directed. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

Love Thy Neighbor—In his latest two-hour monologue, Jackie Mason prowls the stage like a rabid penguin, parcelling out tough love with equal-opportunity glee. His range may be limited, but his timing is perfect, and the house rocks with laughter. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Love's Labour's Lost—The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival's second and final offering of the summer. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. For ticket information and directions, call 1-914 265-9575.)

Making Porn—Rex Chandler has the role of the straight star Jack Hawk in Ronnie Larsen's play about the gay-porn business. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 239-6200.)

Mean Rich White Ladies—An adaptation by the Hangdog Theatre of Clare Boothe Luce's 1936 play, "The Women," directed by Robert Cucuzza. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650. Closes Aug. 10.)

Naked and Hate Free—Naked Angels presents an evening of plays and monologues about the intensely hostile emotion. (Theatre on 3, 311 W. 43rd St. 594-5147. Closes Aug. 9.)

Orestes: I Murdered My Mother—Jeff Cohen's updating of the Euripides play, in which *the tabloid press takes a crack at the* matricide and his sister Electra. (One Dream, 232 West Broadway. 279-4200. Closes Aug. 18.)

Phaedra—The Ridiculous Theatrical Company presents Everett Quinton in a one-man Greek tragicomedy, about the queen who fell for her stepson. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 307-4100.)

Rent—The late Jonathan Larson's rock opera, inspired by Puccini's "La Bohème," stands every assumption of the traditional musical on its head. It can't support the narrative overload (eight separate stories are told), yet by the end of the evening Larson's talent has taken the audience to places the musical never ventures these days. Directed by Michael Greif. (2/19/96) (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.)

Seven Guitars—August Wilson's exciting new play flashes back to the final days of a Pittsburgh blues singer (Keith David). The seven guitars of the title are the seven memorable characters whose high times and dashed dreams Wilson turns into beautiful, complex music—a funky, wailing, irresistible Chicago blues. Lloyd Richards is the director. (4/15/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You—Christopher Durang's 1979 comedy, starring Geraldine Librandi and directed by Mark Cannistraro. Saturdays at 8. (Duplex, 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. S. 255-5438.)

A Thousand Clowns—The Roundabout Theatre's revival of Herb Gardner's 1962 comedy captures the era so nicely that you almost fail to notice that both Judd Hirsch (who played the same role thirty-two years ago) and many of the issues in the play are now somewhat dated. The jokes are still funny, and the star is still likable as Murray Burns, the eccentric who quits his job writing for the detestable "Chuckles the Chipmunk" show with no other means of supporting his twelve-year-old wunderkind nephew (played precociously but not preciously, and with great eyebrow action, by Dov Tiefenbach). David Margulies, Jim Fyfe, and Marin Hinkle are all just right in supporting roles, but it's John Procaccino, as Chuckles the Chipmunk, who steals the show. Directed by Scott Ellis. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400. Closes Aug. 10.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . ***BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:*** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **MASTER CLASS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **ROB BECKER'S DEFENDING THE CAVEMAN:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100. . . . **SHOW BOAT:** Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre—On four of its six Lincoln Center programs this week, the company performs its signature piece, "Revelations," Ailey's 1960 paean to African-American revival meetings and the Southern sun. Matthew Rushing, a dancer with the company since 1992, can recall dancing "Revelations" as many as ninety-eight times on a fourteen-week tour—"but, when you're exhausted and your body hurts, that music rejuvenates you," he says. He will also dance in the première of "Sweet Release," the result of Ailey director Judith Jamison's collaboration with trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. The five-part work is, according to Marsalis, about the "snakes of disorder" that tempt a young couple. Rushing, the sinuous veteran, here plays the third temptation, the snake in the grass. (New York State Theatre. 721-6500. Aug. 7-9 at 8, Aug. 10 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 11 at 1.)

Feld Ballets/NY—The company previews four new works ("Yo Shakespeare," "Industry," "Shuffle," and "Evening Chant") with recent graduates from its New Ballet School, which offers professional training to dancers from local schools. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Aug. 7-9 and Aug. 12-13 at 8, and Aug. 10 at 2 and 8. Through Aug. 17.)

Pilar Rioja—This commanding figure in traditional Spanish dance has always been somewhat professorial in her programs; her twenty-fourth New York season is no exception, with new and old works emphasizing the Iberian influence on ballet's port de bras and a première, "Oración del Torero," suggesting connections between the capework of the matador and the skirt flourishes of the flamenco artist. (Repertorio Español, Gramercy Arts Theatre, 138 E. 27th St. 889-2850. Aug. 7 and Aug. 11-13 at 7, and Aug. 8-10 at 8.)

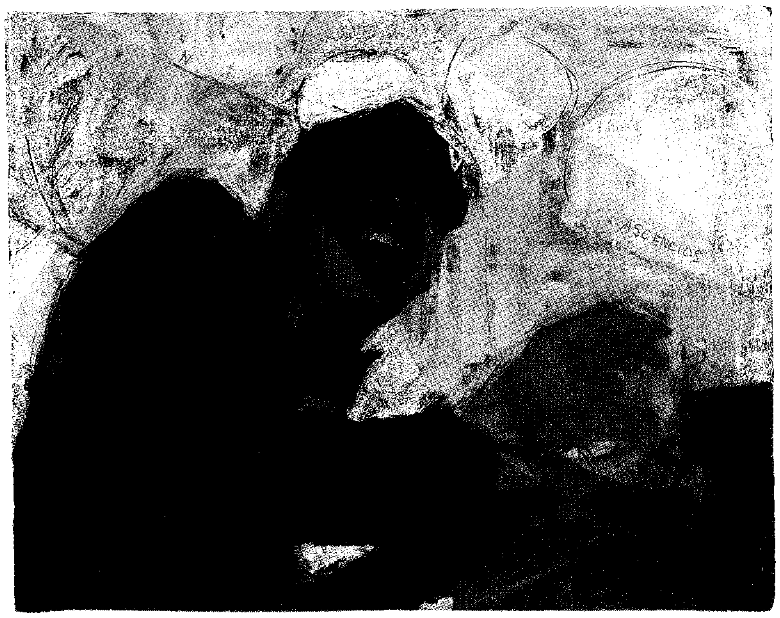
OUT OF TOWN

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival—Aug. 6 at 7, Aug. 8-9 at 8, Aug. 10 at 5, and Aug. 11 at 7: Malavika Sarukkai. . . . ¶ Aug. 6-9 at 8:30 and Aug. 10 at 2 and 8:30: Erick Hawkins Dance Company. . . . ¶ Aug. 8 at 7: Reggie Wilson/Fist & Heel Performance Group. (Becket, Mass. For information about tickets, call 1-413 243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

LYNYRD SKYNYRD / THE DOOBIE BROTHERS—Pivotal members of both these seventies bands are either long dead or working as solo artists (the distinction is minor), but their classic songs live on. Skynyrd, like so many other Southern rock bands, was inspired by the Allman Brothers, and most of the group's songs—the infamous high-school-talent-show standard "Freebird" in particular—were just extended guitar solos abridged to three-minute ditties. The solos were so long because the band employed three guitarists, who had to acquit themselves. The Doobies came out of a similar guitar-driven tradition, but with the addition of singer-keyboardist Michael MacDonald, in 1976, they mutated into a jazz-flavored combo. For fans of long solos and sing-along choruses, this is a double bill made in heaven. (Jones Beach Theatre. 1-516 221-1000. Aug. 8 at 7:30.)



Ray Charles, performing with Cassandra Wilson, at Radio City.

N. ASCENCIOS

SEX PISTOLS—To quote the now alpine-green-and-spike-haired Johnny Rotten, the Pistols are "fat, forty, and back." And the band's new live album, "Filthy Lucre Tour," recorded just six weeks ago at London's Finsbury Park and released in a rush, may well be a revelation to those who have never heard the original versions of "Anarchy in the U.K." and "God Save the Queen"—songs, incidentally, that were co-written by the original bass player of the group, Glen Matlock, the band's "normal" who was forced out by Svengali Malcolm McLaren in 1977 to make room for the infamous Sid Vicious. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Aug. 8 at 8.)

AL GREEN—Sometime in the mid-seventies, Green turned his back on worldly pleasures and returned to his gospel roots. (The move had something to do with a spurned woman and a plate of boiling grits.) But in the past few years he's been working the secular stuff back into his act. He is notoriously fickle in concert, but with that sensuous tenor and divine falsetto he can deliver a love song like nobody else. With the gospel group Sons of Thunder. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Aug. 8 at 8.)

MEAT LOAF—Perhaps the most telling moment on Meat Loaf's frighteningly successful "Bat Out of Hell II"—the cryogenically unoriginal 1995 followup to his 1977 multiplatinum opus—comes on a track titled "Everything Louder Than Everything Else," when he bellows this startling summation of his affinities: "If you want my views of history, then there's something you should know. / The three men I admire most are Curly, Larry, and Moe!" Of course, most of the credit for this gargoyle of an album should go to the singer's once estranged Caligari, Jim Steinman, who wrote and produced both records. As for Meat Loaf's concert demeanor, the best you can say is that for a somnambulist he sure does sweat a lot. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Aug. 8-9 at 8.)

DON BYRON—The clarinettist has been drawing attention lately with his postmodern take on klezmer music, but for this engagement he'll provide live accompaniment to the film "Scar of Shame." (Prospect Park Bandshell, Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. Aug. 9 at 7.)

"SEVENTIES EXPLOSION!"—Featuring the Village People, KC and the Sunshine Band, Gloria Gaynor, Kool and the Gang, and Laura Branigan. (Jones Beach Theatre. Aug. 10 at 8.)

RAY CHARLES / CASSANDRA WILSON—Brother Ray has often compared his singing with Bette Davis's acting, and though at first it's hard to imagine a less likely pairing, on a higher, artistic plane they do have a lot in common. They both developed extraordinary technique and a hyperbolic style fuelled by a vivid, commanding personality. They both broke the molds of their more conventional predecessors by making fearlessly ugly sounds and faces, twitching and swaying to drive home a point. And despite their larger-than-life personas, they could never hide the fact that everything they did came from a deep, unknowable place of truth and feeling. / Endowed with a voice like poured honey, Wilson first came to prominence as the featured chanteuse on "Motherland Pulse," a 1985 release by alto saxophonist Steve Coleman. An ambitious series of solo efforts followed, but by the time of her 1993 Blue Note début, "Blue Light Till Dawn," it looked (despite that album's high quality) like she was being relegated to Remakesville. "New Moon Daughter," her latest effort, puts that concern to rest—even though seven of the twelve songs are in fact remakes. The tone of the album is undeniably cohesive; classics like "Strange Fruit" and "Skylark" have been stripped down to bluesy skeletons and grounded with acoustic guitar, and Wilson sings with a cool fire. (Radio City Music Hall. Aug. 10 at 8.)

JACKSON BROWNE / SHAWN COLVIN—On his 1976 album, "The Pretender," this former poster boy for the West Coast school of introspective songwriting longed to lift the weight of existence from his shoulders so he could be "a happy idiot and struggle for the legal tender." On his new release, "Looking East," he now says, "I want to live in the world, not inside my head . . . I want to stand with the hopeful and the willing." It's the story of his career: from a yuppie before his time to a hippie after it. / With the excellent singer-songwriter Shawn Colvin. (Jones Beach Theatre. Aug. 11 at 8.)

BEN E. KING—Of "Stand By Me" fame. (Von King Park, Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. 1-718 636-4100. Aug. 12 at 7.)

ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE ATTRACTIONS—Punk's Cole Porter has flickered in and out of the pop-music picture during the past decade. For a while he seemed uneasy about his sardonic, bile-spewing, and gorgeously melodic façade. But having reissued his collected early works on Rykodisc Records and released a new album of cover songs ("Kojak Variety") with his brilliant backup band, the Attractions, Elvis is back in the building. Guaranteed to be an exhilarating couple of shows. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Aug. 12-13 at 8.)

"LATIN DIVAS"—With La India, Alexa, and Jania. (Lincoln Center Bandshell. No tickets necessary. Aug. 13 at 8.)

DAÑILO PEREZ TRIO—Perez's piano work reveals what Jelly Roll Morton identified some seventy years ago as jazz's secret weapon: "the Spanish tinge." He's as dexterous and harmonically astute as anyone on the scene, and few of his peers have his gift for rhythm. (Fort Greene Park, Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. 1-718 636-4100. Aug. 13 at 8.)

TRISHA YEARWOOD—Since her hit-filled début in 1991, this powerful singer has been an inspiration to every starry-eyed female vocalist in Nashville. She brings an integrity to the music which her "new country" admirers would do well to emulate. Her upcoming album features work by such stellar composers as Janis Ian and Sam Phillips. With rugged balladeer Collin Raye. (Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. 921-1940. Aug. 13 at 8.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

ALGONQUIN HOTEL, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Vocalist **DIANA KRALL** shines in the Oak Room through late August. A witty singer and insouciant pianist, she is just a whisper shy of true maturity; having studied with the late Jimmy Rowles, she makes growing up in public a wonder to behold. Dining.

BLUE NOTE, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Aug. 11: **GATO BARBIERI**, the Argentine tenor saxophonist with the sensuous tone and a résumé that includes everything from avant-garde work in the sixties to composing the score for "Last Tango in Paris." The dynamic **TANIA MARIA** takes over on Aug. 13. Dining.

BRADLEY'S, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—Aug. 10: Piano, drums, and bass with **JOHN HICKS, IDRIS MUHAMMAD,** and **CURTIS LUNDY.** The members of this swinging trio can bulldoze everything in their path, but when they come to the quiet corners of a ballad, they reveal themselves as true sentimentalists.

FIFTY SEVEN FIFTY SEVEN, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A sleek piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel. Dining.

IRIDIUM, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Aug. 7-11: the **ART FARMER** sextet. Farmer's work on the flugelhorn proves that precision has its place even in jazz's spontaneous and emotional universe. By picking the perfect notes and playing them with a burnished elegance, Farmer makes virtues of control and calculation. His sophisticated, ardent playing distills bop down to a purely lyrical state. Monday nights belong to the great **LES PAUL.** Dining.

KNICKERBOCKER, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Aug. 7-10: Piano and bass with **HILTON RUIZ** and **ANDREW MC CLOUD.** Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Aug. 8-10: **JOE GALLANT AND ILLUMINATI** play "Blues for Allah." With vocalists, horns, and a jazzed-up rhythm section, bassist Gallant and his band take on the highlights of the Grateful Dead's song catalogue.

STEADY ON: *This fall, Shawn Colvin will release "A Few Small Repairs," a tuneful, tear-stained snapshot of a broken marriage. It's her "Court and Spark," and it ought to propel her to the top of the singer-songwriter barrel. She'll be at the Jones Beach Theatre, with Jackson Browne, on Aug. 11.*

LARA TOMLIN

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The great cabaret in the sky. "20th Century Rhythm & Blues," a revue featuring Maxine Brown, Vivian Reed, and Bunny Sigler, continues through late August. Closed Mondays.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Aug. 11: the **louis hayes** quintet. Hayes doesn't get the press that his peers routinely garner, but he remains one of the greatest of hard-bop drummers. With his experience as the rhythmic muscle behind Cannonball Adderley and Oscar Peterson, he knows how to keep a band solid and swinging. Dining.

Tavern on the Green, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—**jimmy scott** is in through mid-August. With good reason, the singer has dropped the "Little" that used to front his name—there's nothing diminutive about his talent, and he can count Madonna and Ray Charles among his admirers. Even on songs you've heard dozens of times before, Scott makes you listen for the next lyric as if it were a password to love and happiness. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Aug. 11: the **geri allen** trio. A few years ago, it sounded as if Allen might spend her career flitting from style to style, making fitfully intriguing if frustratingly unfocussed recordings. But with "Twenty One" (1994), she began to concentrate on what she does best: banging the stuffing out of her instrument in a standard trio setting. Her tough-minded playing, which can veer from dark introspection to ferocious, extroverted swing, took center stage beside her solid gift for composition. Her music regularly summons up major figures of the sixties (stylists like Herbie Hancock, Andrew Hill, Herbie Nichols) and a variety of Swing Era pianists, fully digested and personally refracted; that history-soaked vocabulary is probably what won her a role in Robert Altman's upcoming "Kansas City." In any case, she seems to have finally settled into the role of first lady of mainstream jazz piano. The **eric reed** trio takes over on Aug. 13. Wynton Marsalis has a real ear for pianists, and Reed, one of his recent hires, is a typically excellent find. He may traffic in Hancockisms and Tynerisms, but a distinctive gospel touch enriches his work. The **vanguard jazz orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ROCK, ETC.

Blarney Star, 43 Murray St. (732-2873)—Home to fine Irish music every Friday night.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Aug. 8: **elliot murphy.** One of New York's true rock phantoms, Murphy first emerged in the mid-seventies, as glam was glittering and punk was putrefying—not the best time for a literate and urbane singer-songwriter to hit the scene. After several critically acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful albums, he relocated to Paris, where he's been making music and writing novels for almost two decades now. Dining.

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—In 1994, **idaho** (Aug. 8) quietly released "This Way Out," their second album and one of the most criminally ignored records of that year. The band blends the guitar-driven aggression of Dinosaur Jr. with the despair and sonic austerity of bands like the Blue Nile and Helium—an unlikely combination that's particularly striking in concert.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Aug. 9: **nona hendryx** should be on any list of the great singer-songwriters. As a member of the seventies trio Labelle, she wrote the bulk of the group's material, which was edgy, provocative, political, and full of double entendres and empowering messages. Her solo efforts since Labelle's breakup, in 1976, have been equally challenging, from heavy metal ("Nona Hendryx," 1977) to New Age ("Skin Diver," 1989), with some fruitful collaborations (with Material, Arthur Baker, and Talking Heads) sandwiched in between. Live, she's regal, buff, and ready to bare her psyche. The **mingus big band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Manny's Car Wash, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—Aug. 8: Bluesman **johnny (clyde) copeland.**

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (1-201 798-4064)—**idaho** swings over from Brownies on Aug. 10.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Aug. 7: **peter wolf.** On "Long Line," the former lead singer of the J. Geils Band tries hard to rekindle his old flash, with an eclectic mix of blues, R. & B., and blue-eyed soul. If only it didn't sound like nostalgia. Aug. 11: **yum yum.** The brainchild of the twenty-four-year-old multiple instrumentalist Chris Holmes, this Chicago band is one of several new groups that are picking up where "Good Vibrations" and "Strawberry Fields Forever" left off. The band's début, "Dan Loves Patti," is a beautifully orchestrated affair complete with a string section, horns, and boy-meets-and-loses-girl longing.

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. Dining.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Aug. 7-8: Rock with **king's x.** Aug. 9: **jackopierce.** Aug. 10: **emmylou harris.** "I've always tried to take chances," the Queen of Country told us last year, but nothing could have prepared anyone for the chance she took by hiring Daniel Lanois, the Canadian producer best known for his work with Peter Gabriel and Robbie Robertson, to help make her last record. Obviously she knew what she was doing. "Wrecking Ball" was a stunner—a Rothkoesque wash of guitar and atmosphere which her voice cuts through like a searchlight; anyone who thinks of country music as cowboys and spurs should give it a listen.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Winslow Homer," a comprehensive survey of the painter's career, comprising nearly two hundred paintings, watercolors, and drawings. The exhibition is sumptuous, deeply satisfying, and well balanced, and it reveals unsuspected depths in Homer's art. Yet what will stay with you are the stout-hearted mountain guides, the bashful adolescent lovers, the daydreaming schoolteacher oblivious of her pupils' innocent games under cloudless skies. Was America ever really such an idyllic place? The dark edges are there (some of the seascapes are truly terrifying), but the overwhelming impression is of a defiantly hopeful spirit; even the early, reportorial Civil War paintings emphasize the camaraderie and bravery of the soldiers rather than their suffering. Through Sept. 22. . . . ¶ "Ancient Art from the Shumei Family Collection." A grab bag of antiquities with no theme beyond excellence—and that's good enough. The Shumei Family is a spiritual organization with a strong aesthetic emphasis which is building a mountaintop museum in Japan designed by I. M. Pei. The objects on loan range from exquisitely wrought gold vessels from third-millenium-B.C. Persia to remarkably fresh Roman garden frescoes to exuberantly painted Islamic ceramics. According to the founder of the Shumei, "Unless you make others happy, you can never be happy yourself"; this exhibition should bring felicity to everyone connected with it. Through Sept. 1. . . . ¶ "Toulouse-Lautrec." Through Sept. 29. . . . **note:** The museum's roof garden is open (weather permitting), with sculptures by Rodin, Lachaise, Lipchitz, Caro, Smith (David), and Smith (Tony). (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.—"From Bauhaus to Pop: Masterworks Given by Philip Johnson." Through Sept. 3. . . . ¶ "Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation" includes a hundred and thirty paintings, and nearly as many works on paper, depicting lovers, wives, poets, art dealers, and children. Through Sept. 17. . . . ¶ "Pictures of the Times: A Century of Prints from the New York *Times*." Through Oct. 1. . . . ¶ "Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980-95," an ambitious and engaging show that covers a lot of ground in a thematically unified manner—linking the advent of new printmakers (e.g., Barbara Kruger, Félix González-Torres, Kiki Smith) with such recent trends as the resurgence of politically engaged art and of metaphors of the body. Through Sept. 10. (For the run of the Picasso show, the museum's hours are Saturdays through Mondays, 9:30 to 6; Tuesdays, 11 to 6; and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30. Timed-entry tickets to Picasso are available in the lobby and through Ticketmaster, at 307-4545.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present." The first exhibition of this scope on this topic in New York includes work by twenty-eight artists, from forties studio portraits by Salla Casset and Seydou Keita to more personal and experimental photographs from the eighties and nineties by Santu Mofokeng, Gordon Bleach, Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé, and Mody Sory Diallo. One section of the show features pictures published in *Drum*, the influential magazine founded in South Africa in 1951 and subsequently published in Nigeria, Ghana, and East and Central Africa as well. Through Sept. 22. . . . ¶ "Africa: The Art of a Continent." Through Sept. 29. . . . ¶ "Meret Oppenheim: Beyond the Teacup." Through Oct. 9. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—"Perpetual Mirage: Photographic Narratives of the Desert West," a subdued, library-style exhibit of books and prints from 1848 to the present, which makes up in substance for what it lacks in fire. Most of the landmark photographic books on the subject are here—competing railroad reports illustrated by Alexander Gardner and A. J. Russell; mammoth survey albums that include works by Timothy O'Sullivan, Carleton Watkins, and William Henry Jackson; "An American Exodus," the searing Dust Bowl record by Dorothea Lange and Paul S. Taylor; "From the Missouri West," Robert Adams's complex revisioning of the land. And the prints are delightful. One O'Sullivan photograph details velvety black outcroppings of columnar basalt lining a volcanic ridge; in an exquisitely toned picture by Laura Gilpin, a powerful storm sweeps over the floodplain of the Rio Grande. Other well-chosen works come from Frederick Sommer, Edward Weston, Eliot Porter, Ansel Adams, Lewis Baltz, Lee Friedlander, Mark Klett, and Richard Misrach. Through Sept. 22. . . . ¶ "NYNY: City of Ambition," an anthology of twentieth-century images of New York drawn mostly from the permanent collection. Through Oct. 27. . . . ¶ "Paul Cadmus: The Sailor Trilogy." Through Sept. 1. . . . ¶ "An American Story," a chronological survey of twentieth-century paintings and sculptures, both well known and obscure, from the museum's collection. Through Oct. 6. . . . ¶ A stylized, gardenlike installation of video sculptures, by Shigeko Kubota. Through Aug. 25. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

ONLY CONNECT

Web Sightings

The Tulip Book of P. Cos (http://www.bib.wau.nl/tulips/)—When nurseryman P. Cos, of Haarlem, published his horticultural catalogue in 1637, during the height of tulipomania in Holland, speculation in the flowers had soared so high that some bulbs could fetch the price of an entire estate. (At least they were perennials.) Newly cultivated varieties often got snapped up before either buyer or seller had even seen the plant; instead, they worked from elegant catalogues known as "tulip books." Only forty-three still exist, thirty-four of them made in Holland during the first half of the seventeenth century, and they are the tulip world's equivalent of illuminated manuscripts. Now Cos's tulip book, with its fifty-four (mostly anonymous) gouaches and twelve drawings of fashionable tulip varieties, is on display in its entirety as part of the vast site maintained by the Agricultural Bibliographic Information System of the Netherlands.

The plants are rendered with the jewel-like perfection typical of Dutch still-lifes; each one is drawn from the perspective of the ground, as though the illustrators had lain on their stomachs to capture the likenesses. The candy-striped pink-and-white Soomerschoon is here, with its crisp green stem and sturdy, rippling leaves; so are the pale, delicately fringed Nons Wit, its foliage gently curling, the dramatic blue-white-and-red Saijbloem, and the red-and-cream Gouda. Aside from the names of the flowers and the bulbs' weights and prices, there's very little text.

You can flip through, saving favorite images to your hard drive, but be forewarned: unless you have a high-speed connection, when you download these beauties you'll feel as though you're tiptoeing indeed.

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—"Converging Cultures: Art & Identity in Spanish America." An intelligently curated, wonderfully intriguing exhibition of Latin-American art from the sixteenth century through the early twentieth, focussing on the interpenetrations of native and colonial cultures. Through Aug. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St.—"Documenting the Times: Adolph S. Ochs and the Early Years of the New York *Times*." Through Sept. 15. . . . ¶ "Being William Morris: A Centenary Exhibition." Through Sept. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—"Headlines, Deadlines, Bylines: The New York *Times* Morgue, 1896-1996." Through Oct. 18. . . . ¶ Visitors to "The Global Library—http://www.nypl.org" can step up to one of fourteen computer stations and embark on a guided tour of the World Wide Web. Also on view are a host of nonvirtual objects, such as Sumerian cuneiform tablets, Chinese woodblock prints, a Gutenberg Bible, and the 1727 "New England Primer." Through Aug. 17. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 W. 125th St.—"Ceremony and Spirit: Nature and Memory in Contemporary Latino Art," an exhibit of paintings and mixed-medium installations by sixteen artists, among them Josely Carvalho, George Crespo, Ester Hernandez, Frank Lopez-Motnyk, Pepón Osorio, and Regina Vater. Through Sept. 15. . . . ¶ ". . . To Carry Me Home," this year's artists-in-residence show, features a relief sculpture by Chakaia Booker, a painting by Richard Lewis, and a sculptural installation by Michael Richards. Through Sept. 15. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Summer hours: unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

James Lee Byars—He remains an artist eluding classification—a visionary for some, a charlatan for others. His work crisscrossed movements and mediums, touching on Fluxus, performance, minimalism, and Conceptualism. Some of his early pieces were ephemeral to the point of invisibility; subsequently he developed in the opposite direction, creating pared-down monuments in which he indulged his love of opulent materials—marble, gold, or, in the case of "The Angel" (on view here), a hundred ever so fragile Venetian-glass spheres. The form of "The Angel" is something like a quadruple shepherd's crook, suggesting a possible Old Testament interpretation. Whatever it means, it's a tribute to Byars' elusive, poetic imagination and to his light touch with luxe. Through Aug. 16. (Werner, 21 E. 67th St.)

"Breaking All the Rules"—A recap of all the gallery's shows this season, with works by Beckmann, Coe, Corinth, Grosz, Klimt, Kokoschka, Litwak, Pippin, Schiele, and others. Through Sept. 6. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St.)

"Different Sides"—Works in mediums uncharacteristic of the artists, including a film by Nancy Graves; photographs by David Smith, Richard Pousette-Dart, and Donald Sultan; and a sculpture and a painted postcard by Adolph Gottlieb. Through Aug. 30. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St.)

"Exactitude"—Realist, figurative—whatever it is, there's a lot of detail. Among the artists whose works are on view are William Bailey, Kent Bellows, Philip Evergood, Raymond Han, Jane Lund, and Max Weber. Through Sept. 7. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

"Peep Show"—The most remarkable objects in this group exhibition on the theme of

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voyeurism are the sculptural animations by Gregory Barsamian. The technology is primitive—three-dimensional versions of children's little flip-books—but the effect is transcendent, even spooky: they return the viewer to naïveté, to the magical era of the Punch and Judy show. There are some fine paintings and assemblages, too, notably Janice Gordon's urban fetishes, constructed from found objects, and Holly Lane's surrealistic vision of a Renaissance altarpiece, in a stylish, elaborately hand-carved frame. Through Aug. 9. (Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St.)

"Recaptured Nature"—Paintings, sculptures, and photographs by gallery artists and guests, including Lothar Baumgarten, Dan Graham, Ellsworth Kelly, Anselm Kiefer, Richard Long, Gerhard Richter, and Jeff Wall. Through Aug. 30. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St.)

Group Shows—At **MARISA DEL RE**, 41 E. 57th St.: A sampling of twentieth-century movements, represented by, among others, Karel Appel, Arman, Roy Lichtenstein, Richard Pousette-Dart, and James Rosenquist. Through Aug 30. . . . **HIRSCHL & ADLER MODERN**, 21 E. 70th St.: Paintings by gallery artists, including Carol Diehl, Charles Garabedian, John Lees, and Joan Snyder, and a "painting in the round" by Grace Knowlton. Through Aug. 16. . . . **PACE WILDENSTEIN**, 32 E. 57th St.: Sculptures and paintings by Donald Judd, Joel Shapiro, Barbara Hepworth, Elizabeth Murray, and Robert Mangold. Through Sept. 7. (Closes Fridays at 4.)

Short List—**ELIZABETH CATLETT**, Caribbean Cultural Center, 408 W. 58th St. Through Aug. 16. . . . **LARRY POONS**, Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. Through Aug. 30.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

AC2K—"SoHo So Long," a smart and funny mixed-medium installation by "the Artist Formerly Known as Art Club 2000" (the reduction of the name seems to have been inspired by Calvin Klein's CK1). This collective of twentysomething artists is perhaps best known for its faux Gap ads and installation (a project that received attention from both the critics and the Gap's attorneys). Now the group has turned its attention to the shifting fortunes of SoHo as retail takes over and galleries flock to Chelsea. The centerpiece of the exhibition is a series of photographs of dealers, critics, and collectors—no artists—posing in various *echt*-SoHo locations; the accompanying catalogue includes transcripts of interviews with the subjects, who answer such questions as "Is SoHo over?" and "Will Chelsea reign?" Through Aug. 31. (American Fine Arts, 22 Wooster St. Opens at noon. Closed Mondays; open Saturdays.)

Edward Ruscha—A retrospective of the California Pop Conceptualist's artist books of the sixties. Their procedures (serialism, enumeration, etc.) notwithstanding, they avoided the often prim or sour seriousness of other Conceptual art. (The most dramatic of the books, "Royal Road Test," documents Ruscha and a friend's defenestration of a Royal typewriter onto a California freeway.) "Every Building on the Sunset Strip," "Twentysix Gasoline Stations," "Various Small Fires and Milk," "Some Los Angeles Apartments"—these serenely deadpan titles belie a body of work that, despite its unassuming manner and humble materials, represents one of the lasting achievements of sixties art. Through Aug. 31. (Printed Matter, 77 Wooster St. Open Saturdays until 7.)

"The Baseball Show"—Sixty artists were provided with a Rawlings Official American League baseball and invited to show their stuff. (This would be a snap for Christo.) What came back included a gold-leafed ball by Robert Longo, an installation with Astroturf by Jane Dickson, and a small video installation by Michel Auder, with footage from the final game of the 1977 World Series. Through Aug. 9. (Marcus, 578 Broadway. Closed Mondays.)

Rex and **"Hung Gurus"**—Ink drawings by Rex and a group of works on paper by the Hun, Bastille, and Gengoroh Tagame. The gallery's director, Hudson, has never respected distinctions between fine art and fine porn: "I firmly believe that all the regular aesthetic criteria can be brought to bear on Rex's work and it holds up," he insists. "Why not even look at it in comparison to, say, Pointillist drawing?" That stated, the pictures by Rex et al. are very, *very* dirty—and sometimes also bracingly witty. In the gallery's back room is a small show of collages by the Los Angeles artist Richard Hawkins which feature some of his favorite icons. (In the case of Keanu Reeves, who can fault him?) Hawkins has produced excellent work in the past, but this show looks a little wan. Through Aug. 9. (Feature, 76 Greene St.)

An untitled photograph by Seydou Keita, in "In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present," at the Guggenheim Museum.

"Splash"—Summery fare from Nancy Bowen, William Cotton, Claudia Demonte, Frank Faulkner, Skeet Mcauley, John Risley, and others. Through Aug. 17. (Knowlton, 568 Broadway. Closed Mondays; open Saturdays.)

Group Shows—At **ARSTARK**, 568 Broadway: Paintings and works on paper by Will Berry, Holly Hughes, Wendy Miller, and Bob Penrose. Through Aug. 16. . . . **MORRIS HEALY**, 530 W. 22nd St.: Drawings and other works by gallery artists which are either made directly on a wall, set into a wall, or, in the case of Tom Sachs's piece, shot through a wall with a gun. Through Aug. 23. . . . **NOSEI**, 530 W. 22nd St.: Paintings and a photograph by gallery artists, including Fernando Canovas, Arturo Elizondo, Julio Galán, Shirin Neshat, and Manuel Ocampo. Through Aug. 30. . . . **WIMMER**, 560 Broadway: A potpourri of videos, paintings, and mixed-medium works, notable for a tiny career retrospective from Carolee Schneemann, the inventor and all-time champion of body art. Steve Miller has contributed a pair of witty paintings, purporting to be X-rays of his mother's purse and dress shoes. Through Aug. 9. (Closed Mondays.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

"California Photography from a Seventies Perspective, Part III"—Selections from a collection that was formed in a one-month period in 1979. Among the eighteen artists whose work is on view are Diane Buckler, John Divola, Barbara Kasten, Richard Misrach, Leland Rice, and Larry Sultan. Through Aug. 16. (Seagram Building, 375 Park Ave., at 52nd St., fourth floor. Closes Fridays at 1.)

"Games People Play"—A hundred years of images from the New York City Parks Department's photo archives: nineteenth-century croquet matches, latter-day hoops, a 1968 giant-Tinkertoy fest, fedoraed checkers players in 1934. Through Sept. 13. (Arsenal Gallery, Fifth Ave. at 64th St. Open weekdays 9 to 4:30.)

"Nude York"—Whaddaya think? Nudes by thirty-one photographers, among them Rebecca Blake, Colette, Sheila Metzner, Andres Serrano, Bert Stern, and Aoi Tsutsumi. Through Aug. 17. (Mary Anthony, 589 Broadway. Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6.)

"Photogravure"—A survey of works made with the metal-plate printing process, from illustrations in *Camera Work* to examples by Baldessari, Clemente, Rauschenberg, Ruscha, and Siskind. Through Aug. 16. (Marlborough Graphics, 40 W. 57th St.)

"Summer Salon III (Pictures We Like)"—This third annual show features photographs by Regina Deluise, Walker Evans, Peter Garfield, David Stephenson, Louis Stettner, Eudora Welty, and Weegee. Through Aug. 9. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St.)

"Two" / Evelyn Hofer—A diverse selection of photographs that feature pairs of things—trees, feet, windows, watermelons, flowers, angels, firemen. The artists include Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Eugène Atget, André Kertész, Koichiro Kurita, August Sander, Jill Seymour, and Edward Weston. / Double portraits and interiors that inspired the concurrent group show. Both shows through Aug. 23. (Witkin, 415 West Broadway. Closed Mondays.)

International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St.—"Landscapes of the Civil War." Selections from the five thousand recently discovered albumen prints in the collection of the Medford (Massachusetts) Historical Society. Through Nov. 10. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Short List—**ROGER BALLEN**, Taranto, 39 W. 14th St. Open Saturdays; through Aug. 17. . . . **ANTHONY BARBOZA**, Mann, 42 E. 76th St. Through Aug. 16. . . . **STEVEN BROCK**, Richardson, 560 Broadway. Through Aug. 16. . . . **GUSTAV KLUTSIS**, Schickler, 52 E. 76th St. Through Aug. 16. . . . **JONAS MEKAS**, Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. Closed Mondays; through Aug. 16. . . . **PEDRO MEYER**, Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. Closed Mondays; open Saturdays; through Aug. 17. . . . **FREDERIC OHRINGER**, Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. Through Aug. 9. . . . **DAVID TURNLEY** and **PETER TURNLEY**, International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8; through Sept. 8. . . . **BING WRIGHT / JENNY SAVILLE AND GLEN LUCHFORD**, Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. Closes at 4 on Fridays; through Aug. 30.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

IN TOWN

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL—NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC (at Avery Fisher Hall, Kurt Masur conducting): Morton Feldman's "Structures for Orchestra," an eleven-minute-long work from the nineteen-sixties; two excerpts from Strauss's "Salome," the "Dance of the Seven Veils" and the Final Scene (with soprano Maria Ewing); Strauss's "Metamorphosen," for twenty-three solo strings; and Hindemith's "Concert Music for Strings and Brass." (Aug. 7 at 8.) . . . ¶ Fair Verona's famous tale has inspired many composers over the centuries. This concert presents three of the most celebrated settings: Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" Overture Fantasy, the Symphonic Dances from Bernstein's "West Side Story," and a suite from Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet" ballet. (Aug. 9-10 at 8). . . . ¶ **YEHUDI MENUHIN TRIBUTE:** He played his début violin recital as a seven-year-old prodigy in 1924; he remains active as a conductor today, having turned eighty several months ago. In his early decades, he gained renown as an interpreter of the classics. In the sixties, he began indulging his wide-ranging curiosity, most memorably in a series of duo appearances with the sitar player Ravi Shankar. This benefit tribute celebrates Mr. Menuhin's enduring fascination with the new by presenting a passel of recently composed works (most of them premières, and all of them including the violin among the featured solo instruments) by a diverse group of composers: Chen Yi, David Del Tredici, Lukas Foss, Philip Glass, Karel Husa, Giya Kancheli, Arvo Pärt, Shulamit Ran, Steve Reich, Poul Ruders, Somei Satoh, Foday Musa Suso, John Tavener, and Iannis Xenakis. Mr. Menuhin conducts the Orchestra of St. Luke's and assisting soloists (including clarinettist Richard Stoltzman, violinists Shlomo Mintz and Elmar Oliveira, and soprano Barbara Hendricks). (Avery Fisher Hall. Aug. 11 at 8. For information about tickets to all festival events, call 875-5030.)

MOSTLY MOZART—Aug. 12 at 8: The Canadian Brass joins the New York Chamber Symphony (with Gerard Schwarz conducting) in a program that includes antiphonal consort music by Giovanni Gabrieli, Vivaldi's Concerto for Two Trumpets, and concertos by Leopold Mozart (for trumpet) and by his talented son (the French Horn Concerto No. 1). . . . ¶ Aug. 13 at 8: Mr. Schwarz leads the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra in Bach's First Orchestral Suite, Mercadante's E-Minor Flute Concerto (with James Galway), Handel's Harp Concerto in B-Flat Major (with Naoko Yoshino), and Mozart's Symphony No. 36. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030.)

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA—Conductor Vincent La Selva brings the third season of his Verdi survey to a close with the composer's eleventh opera, "I Masnadieri." Jenny Lind sang the leading soprano role when the work was premièred, in 1847, at Her Majesty's Theatre in London. On that occasion, Queen Victoria's entourage included Prince Albert, Prince Louis Bonaparte, and the Duke of Wellington, and she commanded the entire Parliament to attend in full evening dress. You can expect more casual attire at this staged production, which features soprano Yoko Ojima, tenor Antonio Carangelo, and bass Raemond Martin. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. Aug. 7 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

BARGEMUSIC—Aug. 8 at 7:30 and Aug. 11 at 4: Violist Toby Hoffman and pianist Randall Hodgkinson perform Shostakovich's Viola Sonata; violinist Christiaan Bor and cellist Ronald Thomas join Mr. Hodgkinson in Beethoven's C-Minor Piano Trio; and all participate in Strauss's C-Minor Piano Quartet. . . . ¶ Aug. 9 at 7:30: The Borromeo String Quartet offers quartets by Dvořák (the "American") and Beethoven (in B-Flat Major, Op. 130, with the "Grosse Fuge" attached). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061.)

SUMMERGARDEN—Presenting string quartets by Renaud Gagneux, Alejandro Iglesias Rossi, Dutilleux, and Milhaud (his Tenth). (Sculpture Garden, Museum of Modern Art, 14 W. 54th St. Aug. 9-10 at 8:30. No tickets necessary.)

BRONX ARTS ENSEMBLE—In eighteenth-century Vienna, composers could pick up a tidy sum by turning popular operatic tunes into wind-band arrangements called *Harmoniemusik*. If a composer was quick, he could cash in by publishing his own arrangements; if he wasn't, somebody else would make off with his melodies. In this concert, Johannes Somary conducts *Harmoniemusik* settings of selections from three Mozart operas as arranged for wind octet by Johann Nepomuk Wendt ("Le Nozze di Figaro"), Josef Triebensee ("Don Giovanni"), and Joseph Heidenreich ("Die Zauberflöte"). (Aug. 11 at 2. Rockwood Drive Circle, Van Cortlandt Park, the Bronx. In case of rain, the performance will be held at the Church of the Mediator, Kingsbridge Ave. at W. 231st St. . . . ¶ Aug. 11 at 4. McGinley Center, Fordham University, Bronx Rose Hill Campus.)

PHANTASM—In its New York début recital, this London-based viol consort performs music by Byrd, Gibbons, and Purcell. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Aug. 13 at 5:45.)

OUT OF TOWN

TANGLEWOOD—Aug. 7 at 8:30: The Danish baritone Bo Skovhus burst upon the international lieder scene a year and a half ago. His voice is a fine one, but it's his ability to put across the essence of a text that sets him apart. "I often practice by speaking rather than singing," he confides. "The composers were often forced to set music *against* text—for musical reasons, or because of conventions of their time—but a singer has to find the rhythm of the words. To me, that's the important thing." He and pianist Warren Jones offer a *Liederabend* of works by the Three S's of German song: Strauss, Schubert (several Heine settings from "Schwanengesang"), and Schumann ("Liederkreis," Op. 24, which figures on Mr. Skovhus's latest recital recording, "The Heart of the Poet," just issued by Sony Classical). . . . ¶ Aug. 9 at 8:30: Jeffrey Tate leads Brahms's "A German Requiem," in a performance by the Boston Symphony, the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, soprano Rebecca Evans, and Mr. Skovhus. . . . ¶ Aug. 10 at 8:30: The Boston Symphony plays Leon Kirchner's "Music for Orchestra II," MacDowell's Piano Concerto No. 2 (with André Watts), and Stravinsky's "Petrushka." Dennis Russell Davies conducts. . . . ¶ Aug. 11 at 2:30: Mr. Tate leads the Boston Symphony in Vaughan Williams's Overture to "The Wasps," Elgar's Cello Concerto (with Lynn Harrell), and Dvořák's Symphony No. 5. (Lenox, Mass. 1-413 637-5165. . . . **NOTE:** In addition, Tanglewood's annual contemporary-music festival runs from Aug. 8 through Aug. 14. Call the box office for program information.)

Bo Skovhus, singing at Tanglewood.

WALTER MINUS

CARAMOOR—Aug. 8 at 4:15: The Borromeo String Quartet plays quartets by Mendelssohn (in A Minor), Stravinsky (his Concertino), and Dvořák (the "American"). . . . ¶ Aug. 11 at 5:30: The season concludes with chamber works for four, five, and six players, spotlighting young professional musicians of unusual promise. On the program: Wolf's "Italian Serenade" (in its string-quartet version), Mozart's Clarinet Quintet, and Tchaikovsky's string sextet "Souvenir de Florence." (Katonah, N.Y. 1-914 232-1252.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL—Opinion remains divided about Charles Ives: some consider him the most distinguished composer in American history, while to others he was little more than an eccentric quack. This weekend and next, musicologists, cultural historians, singers, chamber musicians, and the Bard Festival Orchestra (conducted by Leon Botstein) convene at Annandale-on-Hudson to put Ives, his output, and his musical world under the microscope. Aug. 9 at 8: Songs and chamber music, including the First String Quartet and the First Violin Sonata. . . . ¶ Aug. 10 at 10 A.M.: A roundtable on musical life in Ives's America. . . . ¶ Aug. 10 at 2: Chamber works by Ives and his more conservative contemporaries George Chadwick, Daniel Gregory Mason, and Horatio Parker. . . . ¶ Aug. 10 at 4:30: A lecture-concert examining Ives's Second Violin Sonata. . . . ¶ Aug. 10 at 8: Orchestral works by Ives ("Yale-Princeton Football Game," "Three Places in New England," "Calcium Light Night," "Gong on the Hook and Ladder," and Symphony No. 3), Strauss ("Till Eulenspiegel"), Franck ("Le Chasseur Maudit"), and Frederick Converse ("The Mystic Trumpeter"). . . . ¶ Aug. 11 at 10 A.M.: A panel discussion of Ives's life and personality. . . . ¶ Aug. 11 at 1:30: A concert of Ives's more experimental solo and chamber works and works they inspired, by Cowell, Cage, Copland, Ruggles, Carter, Harrison, Ruth Crawford Seeger, and Adolph Weiss. . . . ¶ Aug. 11 at 4:30: Marching bands, choral groups, folk ensembles, and other sound-producing entities converge in an outdoor event designed to evoke the turn-of-the-century hubbub that Ives so passionately adored and often evoked in his music. (Lectures precede many of the concerts. For more specific information about programs, locations, and tickets, call 1-914 758-3226. The festival continues through Aug. 18.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS—Cellist Sharon Robinson and pianist Reiko Uchida perform all of Beethoven's cello-and-piano music over the course of two concerts. (Woodstock, N.Y. 1-914 679-8217. Aug. 10 at 8 and Aug. 11 at 3.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING—Alfresco dancing on the Plaza at Lincoln Center concludes this week. Aug. 7: Tango and samba with the New York–Buenos Aires Connection and the Gabriela Anders band. . . . ¶ Aug. 8: France Joli and Tavares (disco and hustle) . . . . ¶ Aug. 9: Jimmy Bosch and Masters at Work (mambo) . . . . ¶ Aug. 10: Frank Wess and his orchestra (Lindy Hop and swing). (Evenings at 8:15. Tickets available at the entrance.)

READINGS—Aug. 7 at 7: Laura Antoniou, Lawrence Schimel, and Annie Sprinkle, among others, read their contributions to "Ritual Sex," an anthology of erotica. (A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Aug. 13 at 8: Jennifer Belle reads from her first novel, "Going Down." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.)

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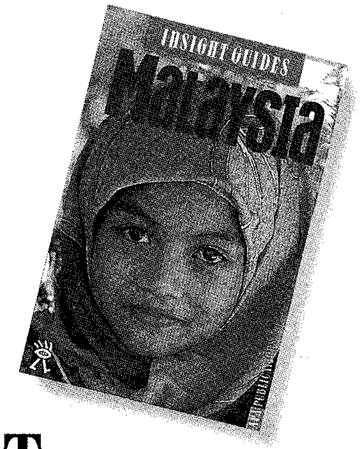

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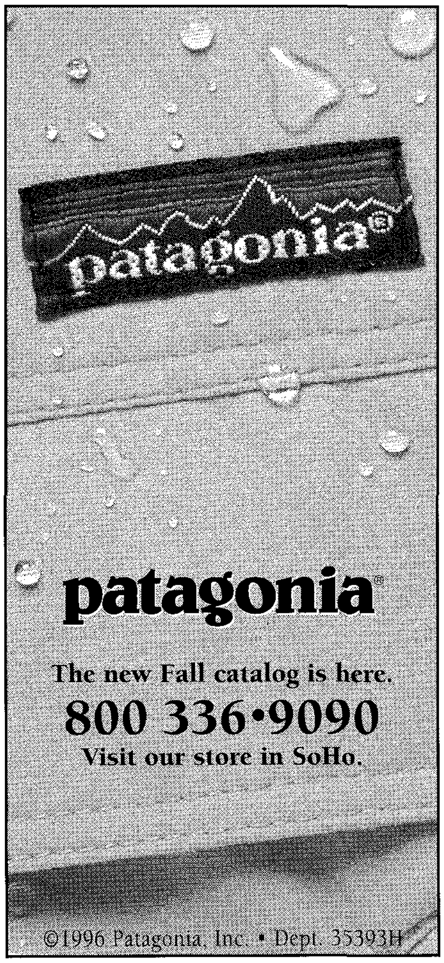

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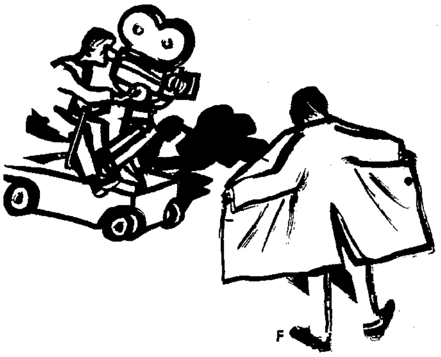
THE MOVIES



FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Basquiat—The life of the graffiti artist and painter, who died in 1988, written and directed by Julian Schnabel. With Jeffrey Wright in the title role. Opening August 9. (Angelika Film Center and Eastside Playhouse.)

Flirt—A tripartite comedy, written and directed by Hal Hartley, about lovers in New York, Berlin, and Tokyo. Opening August 7. (Film Forum.)

Jack—Robin Williams plays a ten-year-old boy afflicted with a condition that has given him the body of a forty-year-old, in a comedy/drama directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Opening August 9. (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Guild, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

John Carpenter's Escape from L.A.—Fifteen years after the science-fiction thriller "Escape from New York," Kurt Russell and John Carpenter return, to the tough-guy role of Snake and to the director's chair, respectively, for a West Coast sequel. Opening August 9. (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Rendezvous in Paris—Eric Rohmer's latest, a trio of vignettes about lovers in the City of Light. In French. Opening August 9. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, Terrence Rafferty, and James Wolcott. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 17.)

Chain Reaction—Keanu Reeves and Rachel Weisz star as a pair of researchers framed for murder, in Andrew Davis's thriller about newly discovered energy sources and industrial espionage. With Morgan Freeman. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Metro Cinema, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Courage Under Fire—The issue in Edward Zwick's very sober and correct military drama is whether the medevac pilot Karen Walden (Meg Ryan), killed in action in the Gulf War, should be awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor; Denzel Washington, as the officer in charge of the investigation, has to sort out wildly divergent accounts of her behavior. Washington's thoughtful, delicately shaded performance holds the viewer's interest for a while, until the material's relentless lack of consequence finally overpowers him. The movie isn't a disgrace, but it doesn't deserve any medals.—T.R. (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Metro Cinema, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Waverly.)

Emma—Douglas McGrath wrote and directed this charming, wrongheaded version of Jane Austen's great comedy of manipulation. Gwyneth Paltrow plays the heroine; Toni Collette giggles and simpers as the impressionable Harriet; Alan Cumming is a deeply dorkish Mr. Elton; Ewan McGregor, last seen as a heroin addict in "Trainspotting," assumes the slightly more respectable role of Frank Churchill; and Jeremy Northam, leading man of "The Net," makes an absurdly young Mr. Knightley. He and Paltrow are a lovely couple, but McGrath replaces Austen's notion that love takes them by surprise—evolving, as it were, out of intellectual sparring—with easy romance. The film gleams with firelight and late-afternoon sun; there's no crispness to it, and Paltrow looks far too tender for the coolly calculating Emma Woodhouse. Ideal viewing for those who like to believe that Jane Austen was, above all, nice.—A.L. (8/5/96) (Beekman, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Fled—This tiresome buddy picture from the bottom of the action barrel, starring Stephen Baldwin and Laurence Fishburne as convicts on the run from the law and the mob, is filled with racist and homophobic insult humor that no amount of goofy good will from the actors could justify. The director, Kevin Hooks, and the scriptwriter, Preston A. Whitmore II, have loaded it with obvious references ("The Godfather," "The Fly," "The Fugitive"); every explosion, chase scene, gun battle, and line of dialogue is so familiar that the movie plays like a series of trailers from already-seen films.—B.D. (Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 23rd St. West Triplex, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Frighteners—Michael J. Fox has a gift for acting with special effects—he makes the virtual environment around him very believable. But he has a big job ahead of him in Peter Jackson's new film, a dark "Poltergeist"-like comedy filled with hundreds of computer-generated effects. Jackson, a splatter wizard whose over-the-top style was on brilliant display in the New Zealand-made "Dead Alive," hypes up every scene with myriad bits of business, but the clunkiness of his narrative rhythms and the relentlessness of his pacing betray him. Most of the jokey first half, with Fox tracking down a ghostly Grim Reaper-like killer, falls flat; but the second half, a kind of "Natural Born Killers" sendup, has some intermittent thrills. Fox's earnest performance grounds the film, while the rest of the cast camps it up nicely: Dee Wallace Stone and Jake Busey are especially good, and Jeffrey Combs, a "Re-Animator" alumnus, gives the psycho performance of a lifetime as a twisted F.B.I. agent—his hilariously soul-sick Agent Cooper/Fox Mulder impression provides, for a time, the quirky, scary brilliance the movie needs.—B.D. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, National Twin, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Independence Day—The big summer alien-invasion movie, in which the German director Roland Emmerich delivers the populist message that the land of the free is still a scrappy, defiant, can-do country. Bill Pullman plays the Clintonesque President; Jeff Goldblum has the geek-elegant role of a cable-television technician turned scientific savior; Will Smith is a Marine fighter pilot who captures the first alien with a punch to the head. At the end, millions are dead and the battered survivors stand around grinning as if they've just won a volleyball game. This shallowness is scarier than anything in the movie. The film gives the audience what it craves: spectacular nothing.—J.W. (7/15/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Lincoln Square, Olympia, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th St. East, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)

Kingpin—If you can accept Randy Quaid as an Amish farmhand, you're probably ready for this movie by the Farrelly brothers, who brought us "Dumb and Dumber." Representative gags include punching bosoms and trying to milk a bull. The plot turns on bowling skills: Quaid is a virtuoso plucked from obscurity by a one-handed has-been (Woody Harrelson) and trained to take on a conceited creep (Bill Murray). The outcome is predictable enough; the only surprises come from the Farrellys' eagerness to push the grossness quotient beyond all expectation. Their desire to make you grimace swamps their ability to make you laugh: the movie is simply not funny.—A.L. (8/5/96) (86th Street East Twin, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Waverly. . . . ¶ Astor Plaza; through Aug. 8.)

Lone Star—The setting is Frontera, a small Texas town on the Mexican border, once policed by Sheriff Buddy Deeds (Matthew McConaughey) and now overseen by his son Sam (Chris Cooper). The writer-director, John Sayles, shifts between the two eras with gracious ease, linking them with an old crime—the unsolved and unmourned killing of Buddy's predecessor, Charley Wade (Kris Kristofferson), who held sway through bigotry and corruption. Thanks to Kristofferson's scary and unyielding performance, the murder mystery becomes the core of the film. Elsewhere you can sense the strain as Sayles works away at the generation gaps, but by the end you're grateful for the movie's weight and substance—rare virtues in a flimsy summer.—A.L. (7/8/96) (Angelika Film Center, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 68th St. Playhouse.)

Opening August 9, Kurt Russell in "John Carpenter's Escape from L.A."

GARY PANTER

Manny & Lo—In writer-director Lisa Krueger's début film, two orphan sisters, the eleven-year-old Amanda (Scarlett Johansson) and the paranoid, bullying sixteen-year-old Laurel (Aleksa Palladino), escape from foster care and begin a life on the road, shoplifting and camping out in vacant suburban houses—searching, Krueger implies in the elliptical vernacular of independent films, for the stable home they never had. When Lo finds out she's pregnant, they kidnap a clerk from a baby-clothes store (Mary Kay Place) to help with the birth. Both young actresses are naturals (if a tad inexperienced to carry a movie), and Place, as a windbag in a white polyester uniform who fears that she's wanted for some Satanic ritual, is especially fun to watch. The film is too slight for its own good, though, like a charming but modest short story padded out to full novel length.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Nutty Professor—Eddie Murphy brings some freshness to this new twist on the old Jerry Lewis comedy, starring both as Klump, a science teacher of vast proportions and surprising sweetness, and as Buddy Love, the chattering womanizer into whom Klump is transformed by a gene-restructuring potion. The war between gentleness and mania lends muscle to what is, for the most part, an exuberant gross-out; the gags start at "Animal House" level and work downward, and the director, Tom Shadyac, doesn't so much pace the film as try to keep up with the unstoppable riffs of his star. The makeup and special effects are a blast.—A.L. (7/8/96) (Art Greenwich Twin, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, National Twin, 19th Street East 6, and Orpheum VII.)

Supercop—Jackie Chan's latest release is great fun, entertainingly dubbed—a big improvement over "Rumble in the Bronx." The director, Stanley Tong, has taken the story about undercover cops and drug dealers to huge, James Bond-like locations, allowing Chan the space to choreograph some bone-breaking fight sequences and stunts. And while Chan's karate moves are as balletic and as funny as ever, he's given the best stunts to his co-star, the fabulous Michelle Khan. (At one point she rides a speeding motorcycle atop a moving train.) Chan and Khan's synchronized rolls and tumbles are so graceful and accomplished and their good humor so consistent that the couple could become the Astaire and Rogers of the martial arts.—B.D. (84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 1, Embassy 2, Gemini, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Village Theatre VII.)

A Time to Kill—Joel Schumacher's Deep South courtroom thriller has the solemn tone of a Stanley Kramer social-problem drama and the self-consciously steamy look of the Faulkner and Tennessee Williams adaptations that, in the fifties, were Hollywood's favorite means of appearing literary while also showcasing the physical attributes of its leanest hunks and its more voluptuous sirens. The script—by Akiva Goldsman, from a John Grisham novel—follows a young white lawyer (Matthew McConaughey) as he defends a black man (Samuel L. Jackson) accused of murdering a couple of rednecks. McConaughey, in his first leading role, is given the full star-is-born treatment, but it's hard not to feel that he has been untimely ripped from his obscurity. And the movie inflates Grisham's modest, perceptive portrait of a Mississippi town into a smug lecture on race relations. What the hero and all the other sweat-soaked characters here really need is central air-conditioning, but what they get from Schumacher and Goldsman is an overpowering blast of homiletic hot air. Also with Sandra Bullock, Kevin Spacey, Oliver Platt, Ashley Judd, Donald Sutherland, Kiefer Sutherland, Charles S. Dutton, and Patrick McGoohan.—T.R. (7/29/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

Trainspotting—Why should people looking for a good time see a film about skinny, cynical heroin addicts in Edinburgh? Because the junkies themselves are having such a good time that what sounds grungy and depressing turns out to be weirdly uplifting. The performances feel driven and unashamed, and though the film sells you short on plot, it makes you ravenous for the next visual fix. But in the end this approach becomes exhausting: you may yield to the film's verve while still praying that it will all be over soon. Directed by Danny Boyle; screenplay by John Hodge, from Irvine Welsh's novel.—A.L. (7/22/96) (Angelika Film Center, East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and State. . . . ¶ Cinema I; through Aug. 8.)

ALSO PLAYING

The Cable Guy (reviewed in our issue of 7/8/96): Manhattan Twin and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **Cold Comfort Farm** (5/13/96): Quad Cinema and Regency. . . . **Fargo** (3/25/96): 59th Street East Cinema and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **Heavy** (6/17/96): Film Forum. . . . **Jane Eyre:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **Matilda:** Chelsea Cinemas, Gemini, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **Multiplicity** (7/29/96): Criterion Center, Gemini, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **Phat Beach:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, and Orpheum VII. . . . **Phenomenon:** Cinema II, 84th Street Sixplex, Guild, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **Purple Noon:** Paris and Quad Cinema. . . . **Spy Hard:** Manhattan Twin. . . . **Stealing Beauty** (6/10/96): Angelika 57, Angelika Film Center, and Baronet. . . . **Stonewall:** Quad Cinema and 62nd & Broadway. . . . **Walking and Talking:** Angelika Film Center, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 19th Street East 6.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Baronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy I, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gemini, Second Ave. at 64th St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema I and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton I and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly I and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

Barbarella (1968)—The décor and effects in Roger Vadim's erotic comic strip are disappointing, but Jane Fonda has the skittish naughtiness of a teen-age voluptuary. She's the fresh, bouncy American girl triumphing by her innocence over a lewd, sadistic world of the future. David Hemmings shows unexpected comic talent as an absent-minded revolutionary. With John Phillip Law.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; starting Aug. 9.)

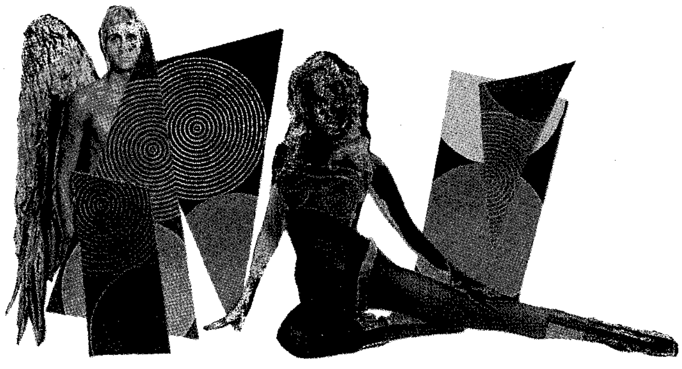
Force of Evil (1948)—Ambitious, overheated, and confused. A smart mob lawyer (John Garfield), campaigning to consolidate and then legalize the numbers racket, finds himself condemned by his self-sacrificing older brother (Thomas Gomez), a modest numbers banker who runs his outfit as if it were a humane small business. Like much of the work of its writer-director, Abraham Polonsky, this compact film noir boasts elements of anticapitalist parable and Odetsian street poetry which aren't integrated or worked out. That its partisans have described the lawyer as a man awakening to family and community *and* as a disintegrated cog in an infernal machine owes less to any rich ambiguity in the material than to its untamed volatility. Polonsky loves premature moral summations and confrontations that flare too quickly and finish soft-boiled. But the gritty location photography by George Barnes, the odd, lyrical stridency of David Raksin's score, and the overreaching push of Polonsky's script give the movie a memorable patina. It suggests possibilities for a tradition of American social melodrama which were lost when filmmakers like Polonsky fell victim to the blacklist. Ira Wolfert co-wrote the screenplay, from his novel "Tucker's People."—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; Aug. 9-10.)

Four Daughters (1938)—This picture sets up a happy small-town family—a widowed Doctor of Music (Claude Rains) and his four musical daughters (Priscilla, Rosemary, and Lola Lane and Gale Page). All four of the girls are dazzled by a handsome, confident young composer (Jeffrey Lynn), but he brings in a big-city musician who disrupts the apparent harmony of the all-American household. This cynical loser was the first important film role for John Garfield, and he's more original and surprising than he ever was to be again. His negativism energizes the movie: you see the birth of a new kind of a star. Directed by Michael Curtiz, from a lively script, by Julius Epstein and Lenore Coffee, that's based on Fannie Hurst's novel "Sister Act"; Hurst's sentimental realism—it has a heartless, practical side—is something you can't fight off.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; Aug. 9-10.)

The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957)—B-budget science fiction with more consistency and logic than usual, and with some rather amusing trick photography. And after all these years of the hero escaping every kind of disaster and atomic monster, it's fun to have him wind up as a twinkle in God's eye. With Grant Williams. Directed by Jack Arnold, from a script by Richard Matheson.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; Aug. 11.)

Journey to the Center of the Earth (1959)—Having anchored Disney's version of "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" with his suavely megalomaniacal Captain Nemo, James Mason was the inevitable choice for another of Jules Verne's eccentric scientists, the celebrated European scholar who leads an unlikely expedition (it includes Pat Boone and Arlene Dahl) to the planet's midsection. Obsessed with research, oblivious of social niceties, he's a cliché of the absent-minded professor. But Mason gives the caricature an injection of satire and a fillip of sentiment: even when he's competing with giant lizards and extravagant sets (from a gargantuan mushroom patch to Atlantis, the lost continent), he provides this geological phantasmagoria with a magnetic core. Charles Brackett, the producer, co-wrote the script with Walter Reisch, adding rest stops in the action so Boone could croon a few songs and court Diane Baker. Henry Levin directed.—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; Aug. 13.)

Odds Against Tomorrow (1959)—A small-scale caper movie with a flaming-fuel-silo ending straight out of "White Heat"—except that, in this case, "Black and White Heat" would be more like it, since the moviemakers have tucked a racial allegory into their melodrama. Ed Begley plays the former New York City cop who cases an upstate bank and conspires with night-club singer Harry Belafonte and psychotic racist Robert Ryan to make off with the hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar score. The film has its fascinations, including Ryan's reliably upsetting portrayal of stewed emotion (his "girlie trouble" with Shelley Winters and Gloria Grahame is particularly creepy) and Belafonte's combination of appealing sleekness and alarming impulsiveness. But the contrasts between characters are schematic, the foreshadowings of disaster (like a doll in a river's muck) heavy-handed, and the allegory strained (never more so than when Belafonte and Ryan point their guns at each other atop all that stored fuel). The movie is best when it's most offhand, picking up the jangled vibes at a jazz bar (whose habitués include Carmen de Lavallade and Cicely Tyson) or the silly adolescent preening at a small-town drugstore soda fountain. With a bit by Wayne Rogers, who's startlingly effective as a soldier who gets into a scrap with Ryan. Robert Wise produced and directed; Abraham Polonsky and Nelson Gidding adapted William P. McGivern's novel; Joseph Brun did the evocative black-and-white location photography, Dede Allen the taut editing, and John Lewis the progressive-jazz score.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; Aug. 11.)



John Phillip Law and Jane Fonda in "Barbarella."

O. KARPINSKY

They Made Me a Criminal (1939)—The screenwriter must have gone berserk on this one, or maybe it was some higher-up's idea to cast John Garfield as a New York prizefighter on the lam from a murder charge, who gets a job on a date ranch in Arizona, which is run by a kindly old lady (May Robson) as a work farm for delinquent boys—the Dead End Kids. When the do-gooding old broad is about to be evicted, the redeemed Garfield enters a local prizefight, and is spotted by a New York detective (Claude Rains). To add to the unlikeliness, Busby Berkeley was the director.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; Aug. 9-10.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Aug. 8: "The Tin Drum" (1980, Volker Schlöndorff; in German).... From Aug. 9: "Barbarella" (†).

Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280)—A program of films directed by Satyajit Ray, all in Bengali. Through Aug. 8: "The Music Room" (1959).... From Aug. 9: "Devi" (1960).

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—Through Aug. 8: "Blade Runner" (1982, Ridley Scott).... ¶ A program of recent films from Hong Kong, all in Cantonese. Aug. 9: "My Father Is a Hero" (Cory Yuen).... Aug. 10: "Wing Chun" (Yuen Wo-ping).... Aug. 11: "From Beijing with Love" (Wong Jing).... Aug. 12: "Somebody Up There Likes Me" (Patrick Leung).... Aug. 13: "The Magic Crane" (Benny Chan).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A showing of films from the museum's Martin Scorsese Collection. Aug. 8 at 2:30 and Aug. 9 at 8: "Battle Cry" (1955, Raoul Walsh).... Aug. 8 at 6: "Flying Leathernecks" (1951, Nicholas Ray).... Aug. 8 at 8 and Aug. 9 at 6: "Pork Chop Hill" (1959, Lewis Milestone).... Aug. 9 at 2:30: "Halls of Montezuma" (1950, Milestone).... Aug. 10 at 1 and Aug. 13 at 2:30: "The Man Who Could Cheat Death" (1959, Terence Fisher).... Aug. 10 at 3 and Aug. 12 at 6: "Outcast of the Islands" (1951, Carol Reed).... Aug. 10 at 5 and Aug. 12 at 2:30: "Pandora and the Flying Dutchman" (1951, Albert Lewin).... Aug. 11 at 1: "The Incredible Shrinking Man" (†).... Aug. 11 at 3: "The Fly" (1958, Kurt Neumann).... Aug. 11 at 5: "Goldfinger" (1964, Guy Hamilton).... Aug. 13 at 6: "Journey to the Center of the Earth" (†).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—A program of French films based on French novels, plays, and short stories. Aug. 7 at 4 and 7:30 and Aug. 8 at 8: "The Charterhouse of Parma" (1948, Christian-Jaque).... Aug. 8 at 4: "Thérèse" (1986, Alain Cavalier).... Aug. 8 at 5:45: "Letters from My Windmill" (1954, Marcel Pagnol).... ¶ A program of films starring John Garfield. Aug. 9 at 2 and 8:30 and Aug. 10 at 6:30 and 10: "Four Daughters" (†).... Aug. 9 at 4 and 10 and Aug. 10 at 8:15: "They Made Me a Criminal" (†).... Aug. 11 at 4 and Aug. 12 at 2 and 5:30: "Body and Soul" (1947, Robert Rossen).... Aug. 11 at 6:15 and Aug. 12 at 4: "Flowing Gold" (1940, Alfred E. Green).... Aug. 13 at 2: "Gentleman's Agreement" (1947, Elia Kazan).... Aug. 13 at 4:15: "Dust Be My Destiny" (1939, Lewis Seiler).... ¶ Three films directed and/or written by Abraham Polonsky, who will be present at all showings. Aug. 9 at 6 and Aug. 10 at 4: "Force of Evil" (†).... Aug. 11 at 8: "Odds Against Tomorrow" (†).... Aug. 12 at 7:45: "Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here" (1969).... ¶ Weekend showings for children. Aug. 10-11 at 2: "Knock on Wood" (1954, Norman Panama and Melvin Frank).

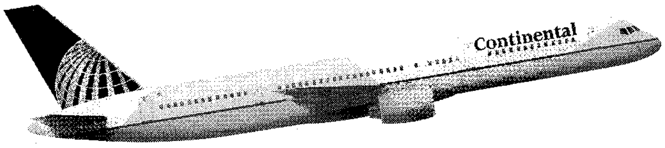
American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—A program of films directed by Stanley Kubrick. Aug. 10 at 2: "Spartacus" (1960).... Aug. 11 at 2 and 5: "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Aug. 13 at 12:30, 3:15, 6, and 8:45: "The Lover" (1992, Jean-Jacques Annaud).

Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.—Mondays, starting at dusk: free drive-in-style moviegoing, beginning with Looney Tunes and newsreels. The feature on Aug. 12 will be "To Catch a Thief" (1955, Alfred Hitchcock). (Rain date is the following night.)

Film al Fresco, at Le Madri Restaurant, 168 W. 18th St. (727-8022)—Sunday evenings, more films out-of-doors, with food and live music beginning at 6 and the movie starting at about 8:30. On Aug. 11, the feature will be "Midnight Cowboy" (1969, John Schlesinger). (Rain date is the following night.)

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Aug. 11 at 7, the feature will be "Ms. 45" (1981, Abel Ferrara).



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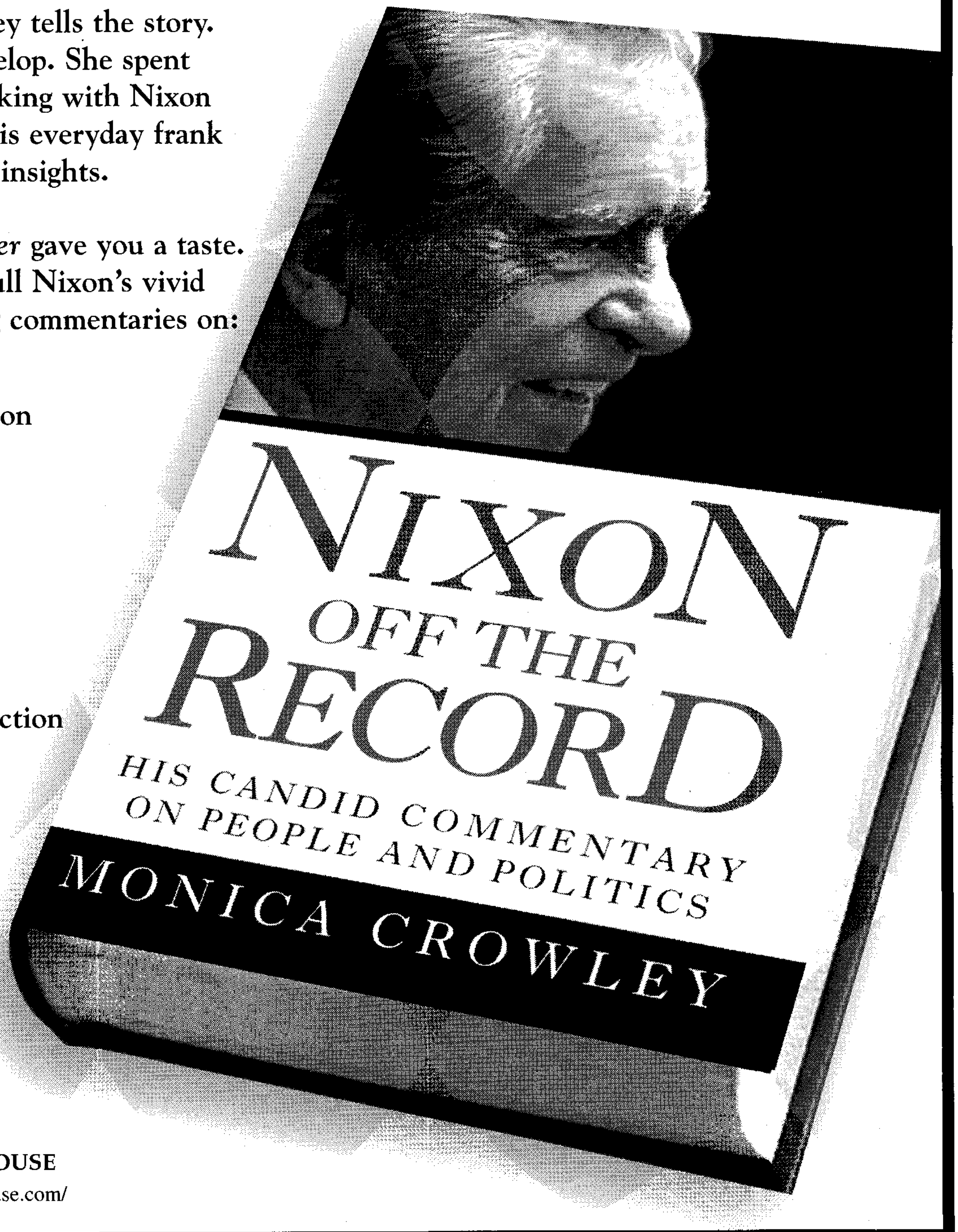
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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

BREAKING CONVENTION

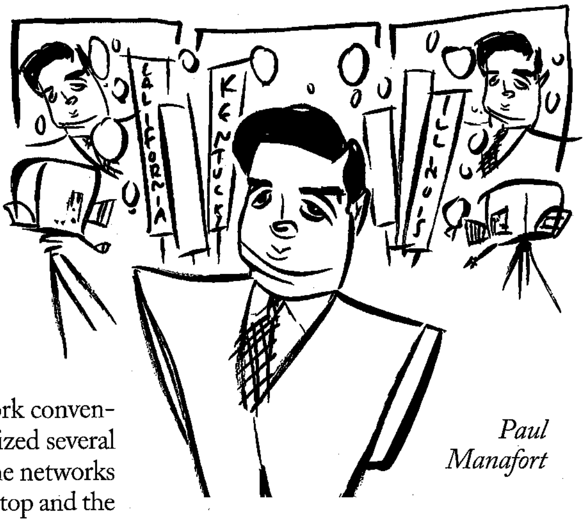
THIS week, if all goes well, Paul Manafort will put the finishing touches on the destruction of an American political institution—an institution that, as it happens, provided Manafort with one of the delights of his youth. Manafort is a longtime Republican lobbyist and political consultant. He is also Bob Dole's convention manager, which means that he is the chief architect of next week's Republican National Convention. Manafort has been in politics for pretty much his entire adult life; when he was twenty-seven, he worked the 1976 Republican Convention as a delegate handler for Gerald Ford. The 1976 convocation, where Ronald Reagan challenged Ford for the nomination, was the last Republican Convention in the true, old sense—the last Convention that was really about battling for the direction and the philosophy of the Party. "The fight went right into Wednesday night," Manafort recalls. "The key moment was a test vote on a rules issue on Tuesday night. Ford won that by seventeen votes, a very small margin. So every move we made, every moment, every conversation was very important. I loved it."

As the historian Alan Brinkley notes in this issue's Comment, the parties have for decades been working to abolish this sort of convention, with its potential for embarrassment and disarray, and to transform what was a messily glorious exercise in democracy into a spectacle of television propaganda. The Democrats' 1992 "The Man from Hope" Convention came close to the ideal, but this year's Republican gathering promises to outdo even that. The Republican Convention of 1996 will, it is hoped at Dole headquarters, effect the final stage of the transformation: the convention as infomercial.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Manafort says that he has watched "hundreds of infomercials," and studied market research on what viewers want to see at a political convention. With this knowledge, he has designed a convention to run according to what he calls "political programming," and, he says, "I mean programming in the true TV sense." He's not exaggerating. The G.O.P. intends to do to the political convention what NBC did to the Olympics—take the last, logical step in the triumph of packaging over content. In the television era, the traditional convention has two things wrong with it: it bores people, and it is subject to the filter of the media, which can get in the way of the intended message. Manafort believes that his infomercial approach will solve both problems. "We examined a standard hour of network convention television, and we recognized several things," he explains. "No. 1, the networks always have anchor time at the top and the bottom of the hour. No. 2, they have commercial breaks" and segments where they cut away from the action on the podium to go to their floor correspondents. "This all adds up to fifteen, sixteen minutes."

Manafort planned accordingly. The prime-time portions of the Republican Convention sessions are self-contained one-hour blocks. Each block consists of forty-five minutes of core programming and fifteen minutes of programming that, as far as television is concerned, is designed to be thrown away—extraneous matter that is placed in time slots where the convention planners believe the networks will want to cut away from the podium. "We know when the networks usually break for a commercial, and we know that at the top and the bottom of the hour the anchors have to be on, so we have programmed the non-core message for these times," Manafort says. The idea behind this is an if-you-build-it-they-will-come theory. Knowing that the networks' structure of coverage demands fifteen minutes away from the podium in each hour, Manafort figures that if you feed them fifteen minutes of un-newsworthy TV in each hour, that is the fifteen minutes they will choose not to broadcast.



Paul Manafort

The remaining forty-five minutes of the hour is to be divided into four or five "issues segments." Each "viewer-friendly" segment will run between eight and ten minutes, will be devoted to one issue—welfare, crime, taxes, etc.—and will contain a speech or two by a G.O.P. notable. These will be infomercial speeches, however, not the old convention type. They will be extremely short and designed to flow from one element of the sales pitch to the next. "Take welfare, for example," Manafort says. "Governor Tommy Thompson, of Wisconsin, might open up the segment with a short speech, and he will throw it to, say, a live remote from Wisconsin, where some real people will talk about how his welfare plan there moved them from welfare to work, and then it will move back to the podium, where someone else will summarize where Bob Dole wants to take the country on welfare."

Television-news executives with long experience in convention coverage recognize the magnitude of what the Republicans are attempting. "It does represent a quantum leap," Tom Hannon, CNN's political director, says. "It is qualitatively different from anything that's been tried before. They have designed something that they believe will marry with the networks' own interests and will slip through the networks' filter and reach the public as more or less pure infomercial programming."

Of course, plans famously gang aft a-gley, and such may occur in San Diego; conventions are still gatherings of people. The human factor has intruded before, and it may again. All it would take to tear Manafort's script apart would be for Pat Buchanan to lead his hundred and forty-one delegates in a prime-time walkout. If that happened, the infomercial would disappear from the screen, and, for a little while at least, a true exercise in democracy—a fine old bloody mess—would appear. Patrick J. Buchanan, the last best hope for democracy? Go, Pat, go.

JOCK TALK

George Plimpton spent a day with President Clinton at the Olympics, and filed this report.

Bill Clinton

THE press has warned me. The President loves to talk. Often, long after Air Force One has landed, he is still aboard, playing hearts, his favorite card game, or talking, mostly talking . . . while outside the press is required to wait for him.

"Get him to stop," they tell me. "We'll storm the plane if you don't."

Twenty minutes after takeoff from Dobbins Air Reserve Base, in Marietta, Georgia, I am told the President is through for the day.

"What? But we have an appointment. . . ."

Apologies are made. "No more interviews. He's had a long day."

I order a Scotch-and-water and gaze mournfully at my notebook. I have a pretzel. A first sentence formulates itself. "It is not easy to spend a day at the Olympics with the President and get very much out of it."

But about halfway to Washington I am suddenly informed that the President wishes to see me. I am so conditioned to writing a story about the President *not* seeing me that I am strangely disappointed.

"What? I thought he was through for the day. . . ."

I am led forward. In the conference room, the President is playing hearts with three members of his staff. The game is played at incredible speed. The President is not doing well. He cries out in despair. He jots down the score on a pad. He notes that I have arrived and announces, "One more game." Three more games ensue. I order another Scotch-and-water. Another game. The President looks over. "One more game?" Perhaps invigorated by the Scotch, I call out, slightly inaccurately, "Play on, Macduff!"

Finally the President throws down his cards. He has lost four games in a row. We sit for the interview in the bedroom in the nose of Air Force One. We talk briefly about Muhammad Ali—about the dramatic moment when he lit the Olympic flame.

"I've known him for several years," the President says. "I've watched him cope with the deterioration of his condition with dignity, and good humor, and a lot of heart, and to see him honored and reconciled with the American Olympic establishment after what happened back in the sixties was just a beautiful thing. I loved it. He was waiting for me as I was walking out the door to go to the car. I went up and put my arms around him and hugged him. I said, 'You really did great tonight. I was proud of you,' and he held me steady and strong. Some days he can speak better than others, and you always have to put your ear up to his mouth, but his eyes were dancing, you know, because he was so happy and proud."

He especially enjoyed watching the Olympic heroes from the past parading on the stage. "A lot of people up there I thought very appropriate. Greg Louganis, who dealt so courageously with his H.I.V. I loved the ninety-seven-year-old gymnast, from where, Slovenia? Did you see him dancing around?"

"No, I missed that," I say.

"The president of the Olympics, Juan Antonio Samaranch, was sitting with me, and he said that this ninety-seven-year-old gymnast can sit in a chair and with his arms lift himself up out of his seat with his legs parallel to the ground."

The President demonstrates, hoisting himself a few inches up off his chair, his legs straight out.

"Wow," I say, not sure whether my enthusiasm is directed toward the President's ability to do this or the ninety-seven-year-old gymnast's. Probably both.

I ask him about his own athletic career. What games did he play at Oxford when he was there as a Rhodes Scholar?

"I played a year for the University basketball team . . . for the second team, which shows you how weak basketball was at Oxford. If I wasn't overweight, I was slow, and I wasn't in good shape. It was a period in my life when I didn't have the discipline to show up and do the practice. What I really liked was rugby."

I ask if he played in the scrum, that odd confluence of men who struggle on the field like a wounded beetle.

"It was pretty tough. I remember we played one of the Cambridge colleges. I got a mild concussion. There were no substitutions in rugby, so our coach told me to go back in. I asked what I was supposed to do, since I was dizzy. He said, 'Just get in somebody's way.' " The President laughed and said, "I think it's a terrific game. I just loved it."

A seat-belt sign goes on, but neither of us pays any attention to it.

I ask him about his favorite athlete. "Willie Mays," he says without a moment's hesitation. "He loved to play baseball, not just to hit, and he always seemed to be happy. He lit up the place. He could smile, and it was like lights coming on in my television set. I loved him."

He goes on about baseball—he used to root for the St. Louis Cardinals, because they had Stan Musial and Red Schoendienst, but then he married Hillary, whose family were all Chicago Cubs fans, and so he gravitated to them.

A slight bump as Air Force One touches down. The President is still talking baseball—that he loved to watch the Arkansas Travelers play in Little Rock. "Nothing more fun than a minor-league game, to just go out and sit there and put your feet up."

We begin discussing golf, which he started playing again in his late twenties. I'd heard that recently he shot a seventy-eight in California. He says that he's been playing more since becoming President—averaging three times a month. In the course of his description of a game at the Congressional, the plane comes to a stop.

We are interrupted by a woman staffer. "We should think about getting off."

"I'm having a good time," the President says.

She looks slightly worried; jesting, I say the press will storm the plane if we go on. Someone says the wife of one of the crew is expecting.

The President nods. "His wife is in labor. We've got to get him to the hospital."

But the President's eyes are shining. He leans back. "In Arkansas, when I was a kid, everybody loved football. Basketball didn't really catch on until I was a young man, not until Eddie Sutton came up and decided to coach basketball. He and his wife became friends of Hillary's and mine, and I learned most of what I know about basketball from him. He went on to Kentucky and then to Oklahoma State, and he's the only coach to take four different teams to the N.C.A.A. So I became a great basketball nut. I still love football, and I love golf, and I love the Olympics."

"There we are," I say, closing my notebook. "A perfect ending."

The President will have none of it. "I tried to learn how to play tennis," he continues. "But I just wasn't very good at it. Hillary's always been a better tennis player; she's quit playing, which I think is a great mistake, because she has a gift for it. I've been trying to get her to start playing again."

There is more to say, of course, but eventually his staff prevails. He stands up and we say goodbye. I can't help wondering if the staff hadn't hurriedly made up the story about a crew member's wife being in labor.

SEX HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT

CLAUDETTE COLBERT was born in Paris in 1903, and died last Tuesday in Barbados. The dates alone tell a story: if Colbert spans the century, so do the movies. She grew up with them, and bloomed with them, and her death leaves them looking a touch more tired and mortal. We have a stack of luscious stars around at the moment, some of them pulling single-picture salaries as heavy as the hundred and fifty thousand dollars that Colbert commanded in the nineteen-thirties. But none of them know—none of them truly understand, in the depths of their souls—how to wear a fine pair of pajamas.

There are two canonical pajama scenes in the Colbert œuvre. She wears one pair to step on Rudy Vallee's head in "The Palm Beach Story," and borrows another from Clark Gable in "It Happened One Night"—one of those casual exchanges by which the films of that era signalled erotic sympathy. A guy could share a room with a woman, but not a bed; the closest she could come to him was to wear his garments next to her skin. Colbert never smoldered if she could possibly help it, and her bright-and-early demeanor may have gulled the censors into thinking that she was wholesomeness made flesh; under the guise of good humor, however, the flesh took charge, and Colbert gave one of the earliest and least vulnerable demonstrations of sexual frankness. "Sex always has something to do with it, dear," she says gently to Joel McCrea in "The Palm Beach Story." He looks rather stranded, so she explains, "You get it from cops, taxidrivers, bellboys, delicatessen dealers—"

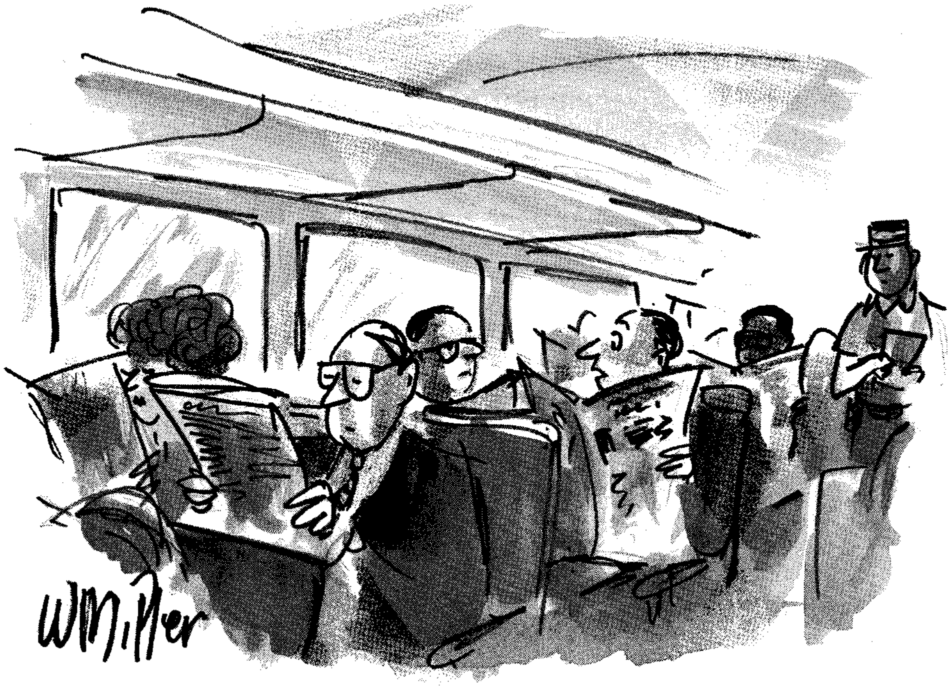
"Get what?"

"The look!"

She's not telling the whole truth, of course: to get the look, you have to start things off with a look of your own. The Colbert lips were ready for pursing, like Clara Bow's, and, indeed, her first movie was a Capra silent, made in 1927; but the Parisian face was rounder and more wide-boned than Bow's—certainly more amused. Colbert was gamine, but she fought pretty hard not to turn *mignonne;* she could do elfin when required, but the temper of her times—of screwball, in particular—insured that there was precious little market for cute. Cecil B. DeMille cast her as Cleopatra, though even he couldn't smother her mischief: when Mark Antony approached her through a path of peacock feathers she snapped, "You're late," and offered him a drink. As far as Colbert was concerned, the Nile flowed straight down the middle of Park Avenue.

Not that she was a snob; it was simply part of her job to be coolly underwhelmed, especially by men with big swords. Received wisdom has it that the Hollywood of the thirties and forties offered escape routes to the imagination; stars such as Colbert and Barbara Stanwyck raise the more durable possibility that you can ride the ruts of life on a combination of pluck and luck. Both women were happy to slide the social scale: Colbert was a runaway heiress in "It Happened One Night" and a high-born émigrée turned housemaid in "Tovarich." At the start of "Midnight," she was penniless, homeless, and jobless, but she was wearing silver lamé, and that's what counted. She never looked down on her audiences—she levelled with them, and they loved her for it. Her best movies tossed up the suggestion, for anyone who cared to try it at home, that there's nothing you can't achieve with unladdered stockings and a full set of wits. In the eyes of Claudette Colbert, it happened every night. ♦

"Breaking Convention," Michael Kelly; "Jock Talk," George Plimpton; "Sex Had Something to Do with It," Anthony Lane.



"Is Michael Eisner O.K.? I haven't seen his name in the papers for days."

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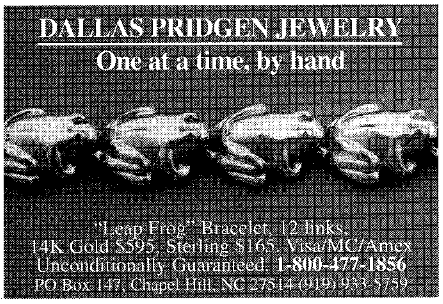

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

HEART AND MIND

At the core of the Clinton campaign are two men engaged in a twenty-five-year feud: Harold Ickes and Dick Morris.

BY JANE MAYER

FEW passersby take notice of a sooty little storefront on Eighty-eighth Street just west of Broadway; its windows are dingy, and its interior appears to contain little more than a few dusty tropical plants. Its front door, which is made from a heavy-gauge steel plate, looks about as welcoming as the sealed entrance to an ancient tomb. But this unmarked sliver of Manhattan real estate is a landmark of sorts for anyone trying to understand President Clinton's 1996 reëlection campaign. It was here, and elsewhere in the neighborhood, that, more than a quarter-century ago, Dick Morris, the President's top political strategist, began his own career, as a political operative who would play almost any angle to win.

Morris had recently graduated from Columbia College, and, with a few upstarts who came to be known as the West Side Kids, he plotted a coup against what passed for the establishment during the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies on the Upper West Side. The Old Guard—the more liberal wing of the Democratic reform movement, whose antecedents went back to Eleanor Roosevelt and Herbert Lehman—had become a cornerstone of the antiwar movement and part of the campaign to dump Lyndon Johnson and elect a peace candidate.

The goal of the Kids was not so much policy as power; winning a seat in the state assembly meant as much to them as getting out of Vietnam. Instead of issues and ideology, they used what were then considered slick campaign techniques, such as polling and targeted attacks, in order to elect their own people. Participants recall that they met Thursday nights on West Eighty-eighth Street and, under the banner of the Community Free Democratic Club, made war on the Old Guard's fortress—the Park River Independent Democratic Club, which had its headquarters in a better building on a broader street a few blocks to the south.

Those intraparty feuds on a tiny square of New York turf might seem to have as little to do with modern Presidential politics as rumbles between the Jets and the Sharks. But twenty-five years later they are having a sort of afterlife in Washington. There Dick Morris, formerly of the Community Free Democratic Club, is running Clinton's reëlection campaign, working alongside one of the smartest and least forgiving leaders of the Park River Independent Democratic Club—Harold M. Ickes. Now the White House deputy chief of staff in charge of politics, the man who was once Morris's opponent in the West Side wars oversees Morris's pay, reviews every television ad Morris makes, even remonstrates against Morris's hotel mini-bar bills. Between them there is "a blood feud going back twenty-five years," Dick Dresner, a political consultant and a former partner of Morris's, says. "From the day I met Dick"—in 1968—"there were problems with Harold Ickes, and vice versa."

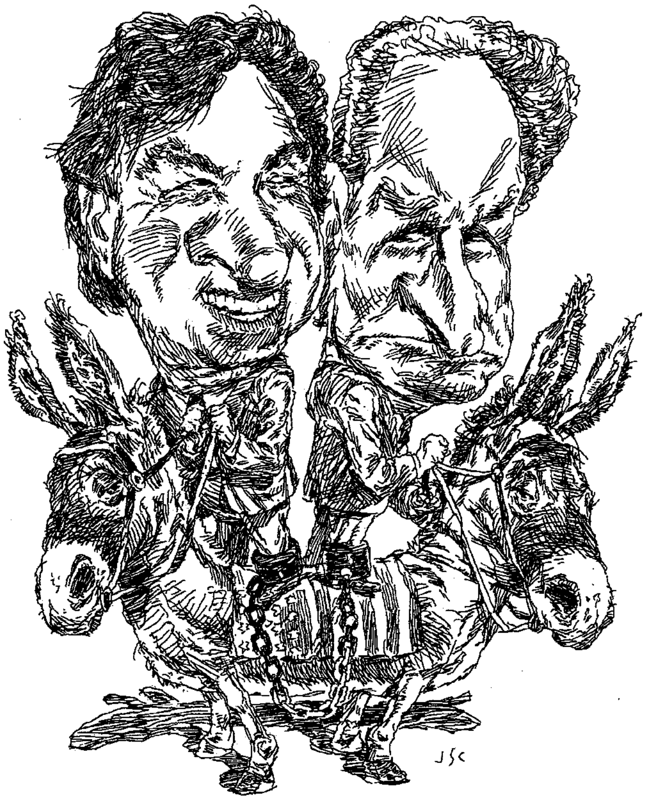
The way that Ickes explained it recently was to say, with a bit of an edge in his voice, "I was in the old line, he was with the Young Turks. They were trying to establish their own base by characterizing the Old Guard as out of touch." Morris has, somewhat wryly, characterized their past skirmishes as "the left-left against the left-moderates"—the kind of doctrinal disputes that perhaps only New York progressives can appreciate. But the rift was more fundamental: for the old liberals, politics was about saving the world; for the Kids, it was about running it. Victor A. Kovner, a New York First Amendment lawyer and Ickes's longtime political ally, says, "Harold was always driven by values. He risked his life in the civil-rights movement. He was a pragmatist, but his politics were always issue-based. Morris was fascinated by tactics and, I must admit, very skilled at them. But I never knew Morris to stand for anything. His role model is Lee Atwater."

In Washington today, as the mismatched lobes of Clinton's campaign brain trust, Morris and Ickes are again separated by a distance of just a few blocks.

Both say that they have learned to work together, and certainly they are united in behalf of Clinton's reëlection. But the years do not seem to have narrowed their differences. Ickes is a diehard Democrat and Clinton's last living link to F.D.R. Now fifty-six, he has volunteered years of his life to many of the most outspoken progressive leaders in the Party, the majority of them destined to lose. Morris, on the other hand, is a man with no consistent ideology—for hire to whatever campaign can pay him best. At forty-eight, he not only has worked for Republicans as conservative as Jesse Helms and Trent Lott but voted for Ronald Reagan. As recently as last year, he described himself to me as too Republican to advise Clinton's 1996 Presidential campaign. Thus the rivalry pits a man friends call a "true Democrat" against someone who may not be even a New Democrat. It divides those who believe the Democratic Party must continue to serve its New Deal base from those who see its salvation in reaching to the right for new voters, whatever the cost to Party orthodoxy. Together, Morris and Ickes highlight not only Party struggles of the past quarter-century but the strangely unresolved nature of the Clinton Presidency.

In part because of these tensions, Clinton's reëlection campaign has sometimes seemed like an efficient but mirthless march. If Clinton's 1992 campaign was immortalized, accurately or not, as a kind of adolescent buddy flick in "The War Room," the sequel may owe more to another genre: convict movies where prisoners who loathe one another can make a run for it only as long as they stay handcuffed together.

FOR the duration of the Clinton campaign, Morris has left the house in West Redding, Connecticut, that he has long used as the base for his political-consulting business, and has moved into a suite in Washington's elegant Jefferson Hotel, a quick walk to the White House. Short, dark, modishly dressed, and cocky in a particularly New York City way, Morris talks so relentlessly, a colleague says, that "he sucks the oxygen right out of a room." He is known for spewing ideas and dictating political ads and speeches at enormous speed—his cellular phone is usually close by. But with outsiders he is guarded. Not only does he refuse to speak to most journalists but, when he talks off the record, he has been known to inspect a reporter's tape recorder to insure that there is no record. In the eyes of his former partner Dick Dresner, Morris is both "a genius" and "totally Machiavellian." Dresner also says, "Morris can be abrasive. He has a real tendency to piss people off." Among those who would undoubtedly agree is Ickes, who is still, after all these years, working at a better address.



Morris and Ickes: warring Democratic visions.

JOHN CUNEO

Ickes spends long hours in a cramped office in the West Wing of the White House, surrounded by dozens of photographs and mementos of his father, Harold L. Ickes, who served for thirteen years as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior and also as his friend and hatchet man—a job not unlike the son's. Harold the Younger, as some refer to him, is a famously intense Wasp—his terrible temper and profane outbursts are legendary—and it is said that he fortifies his somewhat scrawny frame largely with peanut butter, Ritz crackers, and weak tea brewed from recycled bags. Like some shabbily elegant Louis Auchincloss character, he slouches wearily in ill-fitting twenty-year-old suits, which he has had rewoven by his Manhattan seamstress. Although by dint of inheritance and his work as a union-side labor lawyer in New York Ickes is said to be a multimillionaire, his wife, Laura Handman, who is a First Amendment lawyer and is herself both beautiful and stylish, admits that her husband's wardrobe dates back at least to 1983, the year they were married. "He hates extravagance," she says. "I mean, he will yell at me for the way I wash dishes, because it wastes too much water."

Within the Clinton campaign, Ickes and Morris have separate areas of influence. As the campaign's senior strategist, Morris masterminds the so-called "air war"—the campaign's "message" as it is conveyed by television ads and Presidential pronouncements. Ickes is the campaign's top operative, commanding the less glamorous "ground war," overseeing such matters as the budget, personnel, Presidential scheduling, and campaign field operations, and performing the sensitive task of keeping big backers, whether ethnic groups or campaign donors, happy. "What the President really appreciates about Harold," says the New York lawyer and Clinton intimate Susan Thomases, who is a former girlfriend of Ickes's, "is that he really knows politics and he delivers. He's a closer."

Morris, given his far more prominent role in shaping what the President will say on any given day, not to mention a talismanic role that he seems to have (one top White House aide says, "Clinton rubs Dick's tummy and feels better"), holds the upper hand as the campaign is currently configured. Clinton's campaign conforms to an astonishing degree to a plan laid down by Morris last summer. It called for Clinton to disarm Republicans by coöpting the center with a copycat strategy. It was Morris's idea that Clinton should, like the Republicans, offer a balanced-budget plan in order to inoculate himself against the charge that he was a "tax-and-spend liberal." Morris also urged Clinton to abandon the more liberal themes of the first two years of his Presidency and stress instead so-called traditional values by pushing for welfare reform, school uniforms, curfews, and V-chips—issues designed to attract the votes of stressed-out suburban parents, many of whom might ordinarily vote Republican. And it was Morris who pushed Clinton to seize from the G.O.P. its claim on "law and order" by promoting his support for more cops on the street, the assault-weapons ban, the death penalty, and victims' rights. Once these customary Democratic liabilities had been addressed, he argued, Clinton could emphasize traditional Democratic strengths: protecting the environment and Medicare, improving education, and engaging in nonthreatening forms of economic populism, such as fighting the tobacco companies for selling cigarettes to minors. It has been noted that Morris is a master of concocting brave-sounding stands that almost no one can object to.

The aim of the plan was not only to help Clinton but to drive the Republicans beyond the fringe—to the point where they would have no effective issues left. People close to Morris claim that he plotted to help Bob Dole get the nomination, believing he would be easy to defeat in November. To do this, they even soft-pedalled early attacks for fear they might, as one confidant puts it, "kill off Dole too early." (Morris's consultants decided, for instance, that one ad, called "Truth," which featured a cadaverous-looking Dole joined like a Siamese twin to Newt Gingrich and saying that he had never believed in Medicare, was so devastating that they would air it only for a few days during the Republican-primary season.)

Liberal Democrats have been grumbling that Morris has in effect turned Clinton into a moderate Republican. But Ickes has won a few rounds, too. Last year, when Morris was counselling Clinton to reverse himself on affirmative action, Ickes helped to persuade the President to remain true to earlier positions. Ickes also helped to persuade Jesse Jackson, for whom he had worked in 1988 and with whom he still talks often, not to challenge Clinton in the primaries, despite Morris's apparent hope at one point that Jackson would jump in—thereby allowing Clinton to seem all the more palatable to white moderates. Jackson, who is no fan of Morris's, described this ploy to me as "bordering on race-baiting."

Morris and Ickes also disagreed about whether Clinton ought to sign a budget deal with the Republican Congress. Ickes worried that any of the possible deals would undercut Democratic principles. Morris thought some kind of deal was essential for campaign purposes, so that Clinton could run on a record of legislative accomplishment. Morris's concern at the time, according to someone familiar with his thinking, was that, without a solid record to point to, the campaign might turn dangerously on biography. "Between Whitewater, Hillary, and the girl thing—stay away" is how this confidant put it. "We had biography in 1992, but we can't go near it now." Morris is said to have been genuinely surprised at losing so important a fight as the one over the budget. (He had been privately telling Republicans, such as Lott, that a deal was imminent.) But, in what many regard as a Morris masterstroke, he nonetheless helped Clinton to devise a "record" by thinking up a succession of executive orders and actions meant to give the appearance of accomplishment, like the recent call for more rigorous meat and poultry inspections.

ICKES, meanwhile, appears to have won a private budget battle as well—between him and Morris's media team, whose demands of fifteen per cent of the estimated hundred-million-dollar Democratic advertising budget on top of their monthly retainers would have left Morris and others several million dollars richer after the campaign. Ickes, who, unlike Morris, has never tried to make a business out of politics, has told friends that he considered the sums outrageous. He and Morris have yet to agree on a new contract, and without one Morris has had to dicker with Ickes about money every week for several months. "I don't care what they do with their money—they can burn it on Pennsylvania Avenue for all I care," Ickes says. "My job is to keep expenses as low as possible."

The two even quarrelled over the consultant's hotel expenses. When Morris took umbrage, Ickes told the Washington *Post*, "I would be shocked, shocked if Dick Morris was complaining about small, petty things like laundry charges and . . . movies and little bottles of vodka from the mini-bar. Dick wouldn't worry about small things like that. Dick has big, big things on his mind."

In addition, Ickes has objected to some of the ads that Morris helped conceive. In one about illegal immigration, Ickes put his objections in legal terms: he argued that there was no proof that the aliens shown in the ad were lawbreakers. But clearly the footage of dark-skinned people threatening America's white-walled borders offended his sense of a racially inclusive Democratic Party. Ickes's objections were supported by Henry Cisneros, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, who is a Latino, and the ad was toned down. More recently, Ickes and Morris have disagreed about Clinton's embrace of a constitutional amendment guaranteeing victims' rights. Morris favored it, Ickes was opposed.

The conflict between the two men grew especially intense as Clinton was making up his mind whether to sign the welfare-reform bill. For Morris, Clinton's signature was a matter of the highest political urgency; if he failed to sign it, Morris told the President, he would lose the election. Substantive concerns did not enter Morris's equation. In the face of that argument, Ickes's only recourse was to send a private memo to Clinton, urging him to veto the measure as a matter of principle. Ickes tried to make the case that the politics of a veto were sustainable, too, but, typically, another White House aide says, he was left yet again as an unsuccessful advocate for a liberal lost cause.

Both men are masters of subtle office warfare, but neither is entirely averse to old-fashioned name-calling. In Bob Woodward's new book, "The Choice," Morris is said to have privately described Ickes and those he sees as Ickes's fellow-obstructionists—the Presidential adviser George Stephanopoulos and the White House chief of staff, Leon Panetta—as running a "thugocracy" in their efforts to thwart him. Asked what he thinks Morris meant by this, Ickes grows coolly aloof. "Ask the author of the quote," he replies. "He may be a good judge of one."

For the record, Morris claims that he has no idea where the quote came from, but is certain that it was not from him. Instead, he says he is "increasingly delighted" to be working with Ickes after all these years. Yet a close ally of Morris's, on being offered the chance to speak anonymously about Ickes, was far less decorous. "If I were writing about him, I'd be publishing in *Psychology Today*, not *The New Yorker*," the ally sneered. "My feelings about him are so rancid I prefer not to comment." Then Morris's ally summoned the worst epithet one can muster in the Clinton White House. He declared Harold Ickes to be the most useless of all political ephemera: "He's the personification of a patrician liberal."

"À la Recherche d'une Lentille de Contact," d'après Millet.

IT is true that Ickes was born with a silver spoon, but he also appears to have been equipped with a set of brass knuckles. His father, who was sixty-five when Harold McEwen Ickes was born, in 1939, was a champion of conservation and a hero to members of the nascent civil-rights movement for enabling Marian Anderson to sing from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. He was also a bureaucratic killer.

"We are a curious, and not a very pleasant family," the elder Ickes confessed in his diaries. In his youth, as a penniless law student in Chicago, for instance, he moved in with a woman he called "the richest girl in college," who had married a friend of his. Before long, she divorced the friend and married Ickes, beginning twenty-four years of matrimonial misery.

In Washington, where he served for thirteen years in F.D.R.'s Cabinet, the elder Ickes took ruthless steps to keep a love affair secret: He arranged government jobs for his mistress and her fiancé, and then, when he suspected the fiancé of writing anonymous letters about the liaison, he had him sent out of town on business, so that an investigator from the Interior Department could break into his apartment and confiscate the evidence of the letter-writing campaign.

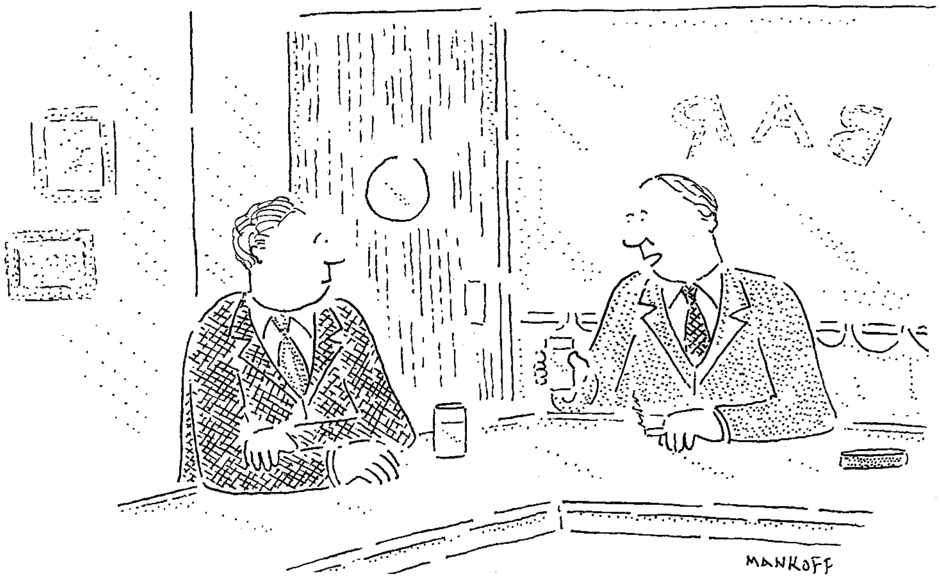
Ickes was less successful at concealing the affair from his wife. A few months after he confessed, she swallowed an overdose of prescription medicine and was hospitalized. "She knew that she was licked, and that I had licked her, however cruel my method had been," he wrote, with seeming satisfaction, in his diaries. She died in an automobile accident in 1935, an event he recorded in his diary practically without emotion. A year later, her son from her first marriage killed himself, after accusing Ickes of unfairly seizing the family fortune. In an effort to smother unpleasant publicity during the inquest, Ickes persuaded law-enforcement friends in Chicago to suppress the contents of a suicide note in which the stepson damned him. They "perjured themselves magnificently," he commented in his diaries.

In 1938, the portly sixty-four-year-old Cabinet officer married a pretty redhead of twenty-five. Jane Dahlman was not only forty years Ickes's junior but also a younger sister of the wife of his late stepson. Yet the couple were apparently very much in love. In 1939, Jane Ickes gave birth to a chestnut-haired son with a version of the father's own ski-jump nose. The Interior Secretary described him nine months later as "the happiest, healthiest, and most promising child that I have ever known."

As it turned out, however, father and son had little time together. "I didn't know him well, nor did I see much of him," Ickes says. "He died when I was twelve." But a childhood visitor to the Ickes homestead, a plantationlike estate in Olney, Maryland, recalls that the Interior Secretary's presence dominated the household long after his death. In the well of a double, curved stairway, a portrait of him hung, the visitor recalls, "godlike."

Susan Shreve, a novelist who lives in Washington, says that Howie Ickes, as he was called, was her closest childhood friend and, later, a romantic interest. She recalls him as a sort of powerfully attractive outsider, who wore cowboy boots and string ties and gave off a kind of James Dean aura in the midst of the very social Sidwell Friends School, which both of them loathed and which Ickes nearly flunked out of. Even then, Shreve recalls, Ickes was a true "iconoclast," a complicated mixture of "genuine sweetness" and the Wild West. Although she doesn't recall his being in fights, she says he always seemed like he could be. One of his friends at Sidwell was Bill Zantzinger, who was later immortalized in a Bob Dylan song for beating to death a black barmaid named Hattie Carroll at a débutante ball. Although Ickes later developed what friends describe as an iron sense of social justice, he himself says that as a youth he had no interest in politics. His father's name, he has said, was more burden than help. And during the years after his father died his relationship with his mother, whom Shreve remembers as "a tough chick," was "very rocky." When Ickes refused to apply to college, Shreve says, his mother threw him out of the house. With no place to go, he wandered the country in a trailer, eventually fulfilling a childhood dream by working as a cowboy out West.

Three years later, a friend applied on his behalf to the University of Arizona; Ickes went there, and eventually transferred to Stanford University. There, in



"Nah, I didn't watch the Olympics—who won?"

1964, he attended a talk about the civil-rights movement given by Allard Lowenstein, an assistant dean who was already a kind of Pied Piper of youth activism in America. Ickes became a civil-rights volunteer, a role that nearly cost him his life. Once, Ickes and several black colleagues were driving through rural Louisiana when they were stopped by a group of white men with guns. Ickes, afraid that his black friends would be killed, sent them to get help while he stayed to face their tormentors. He was so beaten so badly that he eventually lost a kidney.

"In trouble people always call Harold," his wife says, "because first of all he'll pay very little attention to the risk to himself. And also, he keeps a pretty good head." Yet cool-headedness is not widely attributed to Ickes. By the time he had graduated from Columbia Law School, in 1971, Ickes had a reputation for furious tantrums. A set-to during Herman Badillo's 1973 New York mayoral campaign ended with Ickes knocking one fellow to the ground and sinking his teeth into the leg of another, who was trying to break the fight up. The police had to be called.

"You get what you can get," Ickes now says, deadpan, about the biting incident. When his wife was asked if he had bitten anyone else recently, she said, "Not that I know of—certainly not in my presence." She maintained that "his temper is rarely in evidence at home," but she added, jokingly, "Because he's rarely in evidence these days."

Some of Ickes's behavior, it appears, may have been influenced by medication. During the seventies, he was diagnosed as a narcoleptic and given massive prescription doses of Dexedrine, an amphetamine. Although he says he is no longer taking the drug, he still has chronic insomnia problems as well as a reputation for remarkable outbursts, characterized by choice cowboy curses. These explosions, more than one colleague has surmised, may by now be useful. "I think they are very strategic," says Laura Quinn, who is an aide to Senator Jay Rockefeller and became friends with Ickes while working on the 1992 Democratic National Convention, which Ickes ran. "He gathers the attention of the whole room. . . . But I've never seen Harold Ickes go after anyone who didn't deserve it."

By 1991, Ickes had signed on to run Clinton's New York Presidential campaign. He and Clinton had met years before in the antiwar movement and had kept up a loose friendship; as a result, Ickes was one of Clinton's remaining ties to the Party's left wing. Over the years, as Clinton moved to the center, Ickes remained an unalloyed liberal; he worked for the losing campaigns of Eugene McCarthy, Edmund Muskie, Edward M. Kennedy, Walter Mondale, and Jesse Jackson, among others. In Clinton, Ickes says, he saw a kindred progressive spirit. But to Clinton Ickes's appeal may lie less in his idealism than in his skill at political hardball, particularly his geekish obsession with mastering the Party rules. Although these rules may seem arcane, Ickes's knowledge of them placed him at the center of revolutionary changes in the Party's composition, which played an enormous part in the nomination of George McGovern in 1972. That was a turning point in the Party's history, which alienated many conservative Democrats—Democrats whose votes Morris, among others, has been trying to recapture ever since.

There are people who believe that Ickes has at times pushed the outer edges of propriety. His entry into the Clinton Administration was delayed until 1994 by allegations that his law firm had represented a labor union with ties to organized crime. (A court-appointed officer found no evidence of wrongdoing by Ickes or his firm.) Now that he is inside the Administration, he has become a favorite target of Republicans. In 1994, he was entrusted with overseeing the White House's handling of the Whitewater scandal, and as a result he has faced numerous congressional grillings. His testimony has led to a criminal referral from the Senate Whitewater committee on possible perjury charges. Ickes's lawyer, Bob Bennett, has dismissed the accusations as "cheap-shot partisan nonsense." Given the number of fronts Ickes is already fighting on, he clearly wants no public spats with Morris. Instead, for the record he credits Morris with "getting the President to focus on broader themes," and even acknowledges that in helping Clinton's comeback from 1994 "Dick's been instrumental." But a liberal acquaintance describes Ickes as "kind of tortured by what they're doing," and suggests as the reason that "Harold has a soul, and Morris never had one, and Clinton has sold his."

If Harold Ickes is a reminder of Bill Clinton's liberal roots in the much changed Democratic Party, Dick Morris is a measure of how far Clinton has been willing to wander for political advantage. Much has been made of Morris's odyssey into Republicanism, but his importance lies less in his evolving views than in his remarkable ability to hold no fixed views at all.

With his quickness to adapt, Morris is making some very senior officials within the Clinton Administration deeply uneasy—about Clinton, and also about the direction in which he is taking the Democrats. One top Administration official, who asks not to be identified, says, "Morris is one of the most unprincipled, amoral people I have ever met in my life—ever." A Democratic consultant who has worked for Clinton in the past describes the President's reliance upon

Morris as “straight out of Grimms’ Fairy Tales—it’s like Clinton went desperately through his little black book calling up all of the political consultants to find one who could fix things for him, and they all said no—except Rumpelstiltskin.” Dick Dresner, Morris’s former business partner, assigns a good bit of this to jealousy. But Dresner himself says that Morris, with whom he has remained friends, “is a master schemer,” and notes that “people over the years have always attacked Morris for not having principles—or ethics,” and he adds, “But I don’t think it’s really fair. People hire him to win.”

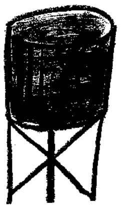
Morris, the only child of a successful real-estate lawyer and a freelance journalist, seems to have always been obsessed with winning. In 1964, when he graduated from Stuyvesant, one of New York’s academically élite high schools, he was captain of its debating team, and was so competitive that he persuaded the Catholic-school forensic league to allow Stuyvesant’s mostly Jewish team to compete, because the city’s public-school system had no interscholastic matches. Though he was involved in the early antiwar movement, his debating skills quickly won him a reputation as someone who could—and would—argue any side of an issue.

“What people often miss about Morris is that he is very smart on the substance of issues,” says the journalist and former politico Ken Auletta, who hired Morris to work as the policy coördinator in Howard Samuels’s 1974 New York gubernatorial campaign. “He was breathtaking. He had total recall and a photographic memory.” As early as 1970, however, Morris also had a reputation for what could be politely termed “situational ethics.” Auletta, who was once an admirer, says, “You always had to sit on him. He was anxious to go out and go for the jugular, or make a deal. He is forever restless, never in repose. He will do whatever he has to to win.”

After working with a citizens’ advisory group on New York’s fiscal crisis in the mid-seventies, and writing a surprisingly liberal book on urban policy—“Bum Rap on American Cities”—in 1978, Morris found his métier: using open-ended polling techniques, much like those used on today’s focus groups, to help candidates fine-tune their political rhetoric. He canvassed the country looking for clients, and in 1977, in Arkansas, he found that the state’s ambitious Attorney General, Bill Clinton, was mulling over his next move. It was the beginning, according to Clinton’s biographer David Maraniss, of an extraordinary collaboration—one which Morris has described as less that of an arrangement between consultant and client than of a meeting of the minds. It is also, apparently, one of Morris’s closest long-term relationships outside of his marriage to the attorney Eileen McGann.

Morris has cited Election Day of 1978 as the best day of his life. Many of his clients, including Clinton, were victorious, thus proving that he could make a living at what he loved most. But in New York, according to one of Ickes’s friends in the Administration, the liberal disciples of the politics of conviction were “appalled” that Morris and Clinton had linked up.

No political consultant has ever switched sides more often and with fewer apologies than Dick Morris. When he was asked in 1990 why he had come increasingly to work for Republican candidates, he replied, “Republicans have more money.” According to the former Ohio senator Howard Metzenbaum, a liberal Democrat, Morris, after advising him in his 1976 race, threatened to work for his opponent in the next race unless the Senator rehired him. “I think I threw him out,” Metzenbaum told me. (Morris denies making the threat, but in 1978 he did go on to work for Metzenbaum’s ideological opposite in Ohio—the ultra-conservative Republican John Ashbrook, who was a member of the John Birch Society and was running for Congress.) An aide to a former Southern governor has a similar story. The aide says that Morris told him in 1987 that “if he didn’t go to work for us he’d go to work against us.”

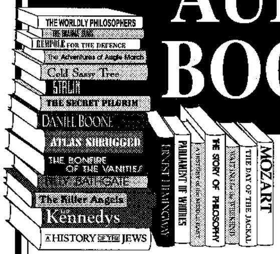


What has deepened suspicions about Morris is that he has reportedly used his special knowledge of Clinton to boost his business with the President’s opponents. Both the *Times* and Bob Woodward have quoted prominent Republicans as saying that, as recently as two years ago, Morris ingratiated himself with them by disparaging Clinton, and even predicted, on one occasion, that the President would be indicted. Morris has denied engaging in such conduct. His statements, though, like his politics, are subject to quick revision. These days, for instance, he says that he is a “Democrat and a Clinton supporter.” But only last year Morris told me, “I am a Republican. . . . I am probably the Republican that he”—Clinton—“knows best.” He described his conversion then as “a gradual evolution over time,” but said that it was deep enough that “I really can’t be involved in any professional way” with Clinton’s reëlection campaign.

Morris is able to get away with these acrobatics because his political creativity is almost unparalleled. In the words of a top White House adviser, “Morris has an approach to everything. It’s not just ‘Your dog died.’ It’s ‘The dog’s dead—and here are three ways to deal with it.’ ” Such certitude is irresistible to an insecure candidate, which is what Clinton became after the Republican sweep of the 1994 midterm elections. It was then, to the dismay of Ickes and many others, that Morris reëntered Clinton’s life.

WHATEVER the personal friction, it’s hard to quibble with the success of Clinton’s new war room. The President remains far ahead in the polls, and if he is reëlected he will be the first Democrat to win a second term since Franklin D. Roosevelt. Ickes sees other parallels to his father’s era as well. At stake this fall, he suggests, is nothing less than the legacy of the New Deal. “If the President loses,” he says, “it could be the flip side of 1932”—this time a Republican watershed opening the way to equally radical social change.

But in the eyes of some Democrats, Clinton has already broken irrevocably with the party of Roosevelt. New York’s Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has declared that the day last week when Clinton signed the welfare-reform bill was “the day the New Deal ended.” By pairing Ickes with Morris, Clinton can perhaps lay claim to both Democratic traditions, and attract votes from all sides of the Party. But by failing to choose between warring Democratic visions, and even warring Democratic aides, he has failed to let voters know who will get the upper hand if he wins a second term. “Ickes and Morris very faithfully represent the tension within Clinton, and that which is built into this Administration,” the Presidential historian Michael Beschloss says. “If Clinton wins,” he adds, “the question will be: Which tradition will prevail?” Neither Ickes nor Morris nor Clinton himself may know the answer. As one longtime member of the Administration puts it, “Clinton lives for the day. He assumes he’ll get out of it later. There may be big problems—but not until after November.” ♦



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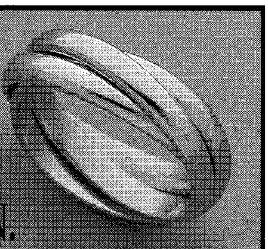

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LETTER FROM CALIFORNIA

BATHING-SUIT HEROINES

Who's afraid of a thong?

BY ALISON ROSE

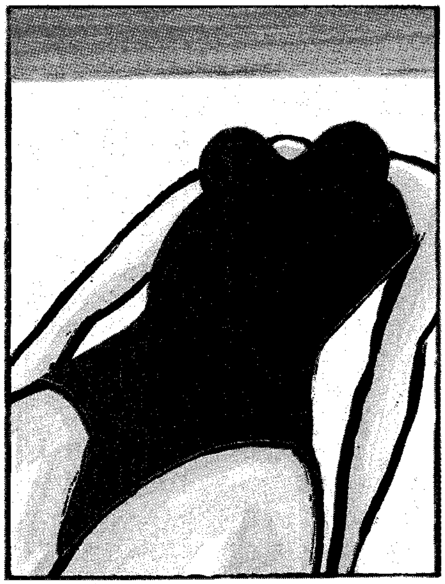
A POOLSIDE CHAT

A WOMAN can find a way to detest every millimetre of her body when she puts on a bathing suit. Anne Cole, the doyenne of the bathing-suit world, who has bathing suits in her bloodstream—her father began making them in 1925—is a major-league authority on this subject. One afternoon recently, I was over at her house, in Beverly Hills, where she and her friend Susan Flora were sitting by a thirty-foot pool with a lapis-blue tile border. Susan, who is in her forties and used to own nine Benetton stores ("She slaps me down when something is ugly," Anne told me), was wearing a slippery maillot and a look that said she couldn't care less what you thought about her or her bathing suit. Anne Cole, who is in late middle age and is short and powerful-looking, with light reddish-blond hair cut short, sort of like a helmet, was wearing trousers. She was telling me about how she has made appearances in department stores for more than twenty-five years.

"Every misshapen woman in America has come to see me," she said. "They gather every problem they've ever had and come on in."

What do they say?

"Well, they come in and say, 'I have a big-hip problem,' and you get them in the fitting room and you know it's never as horrible as you—well, I mean sometimes there *are* some big hips and there *are* bosoms dropping to the waist, bosoms heading south for the winter. But the philosophy of the swimsuit has changed. In the early days, in the fifties, when I first started, women didn't exercise, so you really did have a cup, or a skirt for the hip problem or the big leg, the full leg—well, *big heavy thigh*, let's call it what it is. But the maillot is the No. 1 silhouette selling today. We found it easier to go around the flab than to try to cut through it, and in doing that we make the leg look longer. It doesn't cut the leg off at the worst spot and make it look dumpier." Anne has a way of being polite, no matter what unpleasant flaws she is describing. "You know, in the fifties, early sixties, we used to have the front skirt. You know the old front skirt? It had that front panel that's supposed to minimize a leg, but instead of having two stumpy legs you had *one big fat stump*."



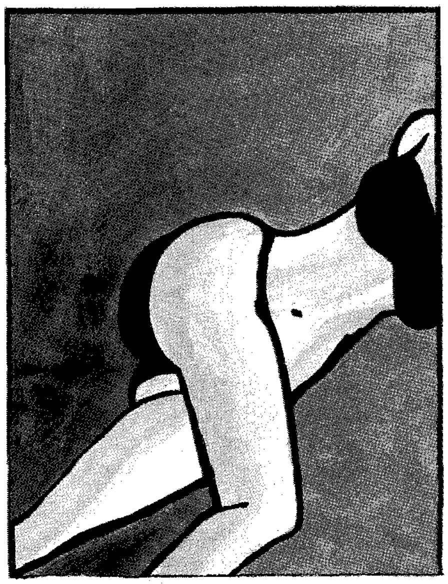
FILIP PAGOWSKI

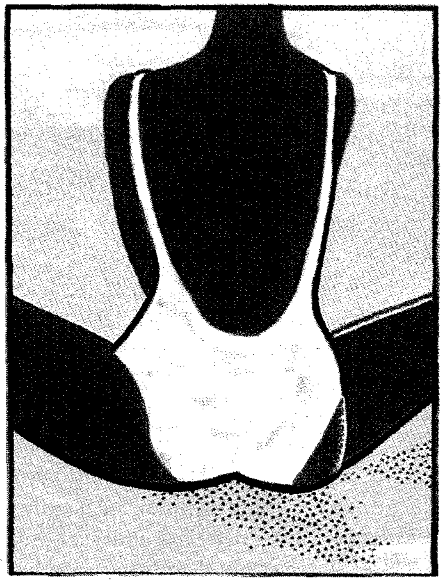
A SUIT IS BUILT LIKE A BRIDGE

COLE of California is most famous for the classic American bathing suit. Nearly every woman in the U.S.A. has probably worn a Cole at one time or another. Anne Cole's father founded the company, and Anne has worked for Cole, even when she preferred to run away, almost all her life. She didn't begin designing her own line of bathing suits until 1982, when she was in her fifties, but she and her staff now design a hundred and ten styles of suits each year for the Anne Cole label, which merged with the Authentic Fitness Corporation in 1993.

Fred Cole, Anne's father, who was an actor in the movies as a young man, had been on the swim team in college. When he went to work for one of several factories owned by his father—West Coast Manchester Knitting Mills, in Vernon, California, which made ladies' drop-seat woollen underwear—he decided the family should start making wool bathing suits.

Later, he invented the cotton bathing suit, Anne told me. "Well, he didn't *invent* it, but his designer figured out a way of sewing a rigid fabric with an elasticized thread. That was an innovation. No one is alive today who remembers that, except, I guess, me." In 1941, Fred Cole changed the name of West Coast Manchester Knitting Mills to Cole of California. "Swimming really began in the nineteen-forties, when our G.I.s went through California during the war years," Anne said. "They saw all that California sunshine and wanted to live the more active, casual life style that the West Coast inspired. Pinup girls à la Betty Grable were all the rage then. And, because rubberized fabric went to war, the skimpier the swimsuit or shorts—well, you were just doing your part for the war effort. During the Second World War, Cole factories made parachutes."





It would have been easy for Anne to be just another spoiled rich girl, but she wasn't. In 1951 and 1952, she had a summer job at Cole running errands. She went out to M-G-M to take Esther Williams (who was endorsing Cole) her bathing suit and then bring it back to the factory. Elizabeth Taylor was making "Ivanhoe" at M-G-M at around that time, and she and Anne became friends. Years later, Anne and Elizabeth Taylor would pass each other in their cars on an L.A. freeway and roll down the windows, and Taylor would yell, "Send me a dozen! Size 8!"

In her offices at the Authentic Fitness factory-distribution center, in East Los Angeles, Anne Cole showed me a big black-and-white photomural of annual "shows" that were given at the Coles' house from 1946 to 1950. "There's Essie, 1948, right there with my father," she said. "She liked my father, and he liked all women. He loved to do shows—he was like Barnum." Then Anne pointed to another photograph of Esther—in a white suit, climbing out of a pool with a big smile on her face—and said, "Little tummy there, baby." There were also photographs of Paulette Goddard, Ann Sheridan, and June Haver, who came to the Cole parties, and one from 1946 that showed a floating merry-go-round and girls in sequinned bathing suits, wearing net capes covered with real flowers and riding in little canoes. "It was very outgoing and magnanimous in those days," Anne said. "A time to play, a time for fun. I was glad to be around and live in those days. You didn't have to work every day of the year."

At one of Authentic Fitness's three factories, a hundred and forty people are sitting at sewing machines in neat rows of forty-two. There is fabric everywhere—so many colors and prints that the room can't look depressing. On two walls there are dozens of soda-bottle-size cones of thread in more colors than it's possible to think up; if you just stare at the cones for a while, you don't have to take a vacation to the Bahamas. A dark-haired man in an aqua shirt has earphones on his head and is clipping threads from a white one-piece suit very fast. "A suit is built like a bridge, with stresses and strains," Anne says as she walks up and down the aisles like a subdued drum majorette. "Some of these ladies just do backs and crotches." Piles and piles of bra cups and bra tops and boxes of pushup pads and piles of two-piece-suit bottoms are next to the sewing machines, and a woman in a blue smock is putting flesh-colored pads into a black one-piece underwired suit. "I've always had big mamas," Anne says, with some world-weariness, "so I didn't see how anyone could wish for it and put it in a suit."

BAYWATCH

ANNE told me she'd never "emphasized the derrière" in her designs, but I wanted to talk to someone about the more provocative suits I was seeing on Venice Beach, so I called up Sydney Coale Phillips, who lives in Santa Monica and played a lifeguard on "Baywatch" off and on for three seasons. I asked her if they ever wore thongs on the show.

"They had them on the first few shows, but now the producers decided it's a family show," Sydney told me, and she added, "This is a butt-oriented culture. You know the bright-red tank suit cut low in the front, high in the back, that they wear on 'Baywatch'? It's *verging* on being a thong. It creeps up your backside, and when you had to do a saving scene it crept up and your entire buttocks were revealed to the world and to the camera. The assistant director had an electronic bullhorn, and he'd shout at the top of his lungs, 'You have a *wedgie!* Pull down the *wedgie!*' And then you'd have to fix it."

"What about Pamela Anderson's bathing suit?" I asked her.

"She has that made for her," Sydney said. "Like all the suits on the show, you can see right through it when it's wet. People call her the trailer-park, all-American, shopping-mall Brigitte Bardot. She's like the Esther Williams of TV, except Pamela's kind of short. Most of the women on the show are quite petite and not athletic. Well, I mean they're *toned*, but . . ."

Sydney also told me about some of the stuff she sees on the beach in real life: "Teeny-weeny bikinis you can see through, made of some kind of a lacy fabric. You may as well be nude on the beach. You can pay a hundred dollars or more for four square inches of fabric. And there's Butt Floss."

"What is that, exactly?" I asked.

"In extreme cases, the triangle in the back of the thong is reduced to just a string," she explained. "The directors on 'Baywatch' would always say, 'No Butt Floss on the set!' "

THE WRONG THING

On the floor of one of five small fitting rooms at Canyon Beachwear, in Santa Monica, which is probably the only place to see twenty-five hundred bathing suits in three hundred and seventy-five square feet other than at the Authentic Fitness factory, there are red bikini bottoms lying almost inside out, as if they'd been kicked off hard. Behind the curtain, in another fitting room, are bare feet and total silence.

"Well, everybody does hate their body," Kathleen Mudd, the owner, tells me, in a levelheaded way. She sighs. "What they pick off the rack is usually the wrong thing. We help them, though, so they don't get depressed or run out of the store. Everybody comes in saying they don't want another black suit, but they usually get a black suit."

Kathleen shows me some board shorts—these are what surfers wear, and they look like shorts, only longer and skinnier—and I saw a lot more of them at Horizons West, a surfer shop in Santa Monica. Randy Wright, who owns it, has been surfing for nineteen years. He also sells wetsuits, dry suits, waterproof watches, and surfboards. He says that surfers refer to girls as chicks, Bettys, or finies, and that board shorts on women are "really cool, low on the hips." He pulls up the T-shirt on a young woman with long red-streaked black hair to make his point. Her shorts are low on her hips. She giggles and pulls the T-shirt back down.

"Are surfers ever fat?" I ask him.

"I've never seen a fat surfer," he says. "Never."

MALIBU

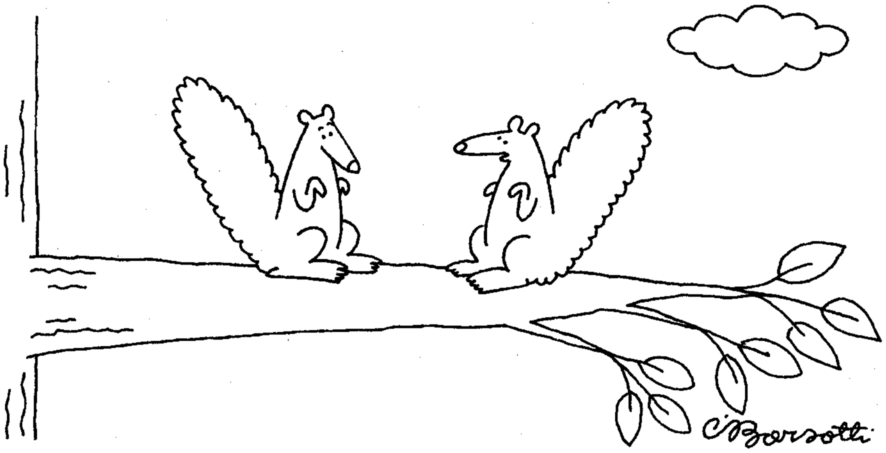
I go to Malibu in search of board shorts, but when I actually see a surfer—a mermaid boy, with floppy straight blond hair and the longest, narrowest torso and even longer legs—he's wearing a wetsuit. He's carrying a surfboard, heading for the ocean, says he's sixteen. A few minutes later, a tall woman with the same blond hair and the same torso and legs is running fast across the sand. She's his mother, as it happens. She watches him paddle out.

A bronzed young woman in a neon-orange bikini—suntan oil all over her—is on her back on a white towel.

Three young Frenchmen stand huddled together wearing long shorts to the knee: navy, red, rosy pink. They all have their baseball caps on backward, and, though I'm not wearing a bathing suit (I'm wearing my New York black uniform), I am pulled into the undertow of California beach life. I sort of collapse into a flirtation with Rosy-pink and ask him a lot of questions about revealing swimwear. He takes off his baseball cap and says, "Be careful—you want a French kiss?"

MODESTY

Esther Williams, who was a 1940 Olympic hopeful, a swimming star in forties and fifties movies, and the grande dame of synchronized swimming, sat with me by her pool, up in the hills of Beverly Hills.



"How will you ever know whether you're a flying squirrel if you don't give it a shot?"

Miss Williams looks like Esther Williams—just a bit older—and has light-brown hair swept high in the front and pulled back in a chignon. She's tall. "Real swimmers *own* the water," she said. "Johnny Weissmuller had it." She moved her hands as if she were doing the breaststroke. Miss Williams likes to talk about bathing suits. She isn't tired of them. (She even designs her own line, the Esther Williams Collection.) She told me about the suit she wore when she was fifteen, when she won the 1939 Nationals in Des Moines: "It was black, and it was totally transparent when it was wet. It was made of Chinese silk. It was like nothing on your body. And what you had to do was not notice that everything showed through. Your nipples—there was nothing left to the imagination. We all wore them, and we quickly got towels around us. They were called racing suits, and they were like wisps of silk—as if you had gone swimming in lingerie. And I think that helped a lot when I had to walk around a pool at M-G-M and be photographed. I had already got all that modesty thing taken care of, so I didn't kind of creep around—because, you know, it's a proud thing to be a swimming champion. So I *walked*, instead of wishing I could crawl into my shoulder blades, you know?"

Did she remember the first bathing suit she ever wore? I asked.

"I'll show you a picture of it," Esther said. "It had holes in it." And when the sun went down we went into the house, and she showed me: the suit, a woollen one-piece to the top of her knees, with short sleeves, did have some holes. Five-year-old Esther had short hair, bangs, and a determined expression on her face. The picture was taken at Hermosa Beach, where her sister taught her to swim during the Depression. "I rode waves, and of course that's pretty thrilling, to catch a wave when you're five years old and ride it in to the shore."

There was also a photograph of Esther in a Cole of California ad (in the suit from "Neptune's Daughter"), whose slogan was "Like Esther this suit has everything." Esther looked at it and said, in an affectionately bitchy way, mostly to herself, "Anne Cole thinks I was having an affair with her father, but I wasn't."

I asked Esther if she remembered the

first pool she ever went swimming in.

"What happened was my mother was a *doer*," Esther said. "And there was a city playground being built in our rather deprived neighborhood, and there was no pool. And she got a petition up, and she got Parks and Recreation to build that pool, and they said, 'Well, you worked so hard to get it built, is there anybody you want to inaugurate it when we open it for the first day?' And she said, 'Yes, my eight-year-old daughter.' And they said, 'Can she swim?' And she said, 'She will by the time you open it.' And so they had me dive in and swim across and swim back, and I got out of the pool and everybody applauded: 'Hooray for Esther!' "

CALIFORNIA GIRLS

HOTEL poolsides are pretty in a contrived sort of way—the blue-looking water has a particular allure—and one afternoon, as the last stop on my tour of bathing-suit life, I paid a visit to the Peninsula Hotel with Anne Cole. The pool was on the fifth-floor roof—an oval up in the sky, with tall buildings all around it. Honeysuckle was growing here and there, the cabañas had white curtains, and the lounge chairs were covered with turquoise and white stripes.

No one here was fat, but two women were smoking. Anne pointed out her designs: a black suit with white piping on a thin blonde, and a black crisscross suit on a brunette. A very young woman wore a two-piece daisy print—not a Cole. "It's inexpensive," Anne said. "Not that there's anything *wrong* with it. This is America."

I remember most of the bathing suits from my California childhood. There was always something thrilling about the hottest part of summer and the feel of one on my body. The bathing suit I liked best—I was around four years old—was a pale-green cotton with a small pattern on it. The straps were wide and had wavy edges. I forget whether it was made by Catalina or by Cole. I remember being happy in that green bathing suit, bobby pins holding my hair on top of my head under the hot sun by the pool, but the most fun was the day I wore it on the beach in Carmel and had my first tuna-fish sandwich wrapped in wax paper.

"What ever happened to Catalina?" I asked Anne.

"Catalina went to Wal-Mart," she said, as if she didn't have the strength to keep the whole world from falling apart. ◆

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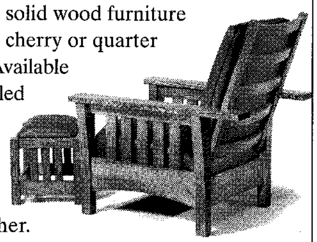

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THE GROWTH FALLACY

Bob Dole, Bill Clinton, and an increasing number of economists in both parties agree on one thing. They may be wrong.

BY JOHN CASSIDY

WHILE Ross Perot's Reform Party is struggling, another seductive movement, which might be called the Economic Growth Party, is quickly gaining followers from across the political spectrum. It already has financial support from major corporations, political support from within both major parties, and personal support from a wide range of influential figures, including Jack Welch, the chairman of General Electric; Jack Kemp, the former Housing Secretary; and Felix Rohatyn, the Wall Street investment banker. Now Bob Dole and, to some extent, Bill Clinton appear to be on the verge of discovering that they, too, are believers. Dole is about to propose a multibillion-dollar package of tax cuts, which he hopes will revive his flagging campaign by appealing to voters' disappointed expectations and offering the prospect of better times not far ahead. "Slow growth is America's number one economic problem," declared a Dole-campaign draft memorandum recently obtained by the *Wall Street Journal*. "America desperately needs new pro-growth policies to raise wages and secure the incomes of workers, now and in the next century." The White House, not to be outdone, is quietly pressing the Federal Reserve Board to maintain the present rate of interest, at least until after the election, and claiming that its policies have laid the groundwork for rising wages and higher growth. "We have turned the corner," Joseph Stiglitz, the chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, told the *Times* last week.

ANDRZEJ CZECZOT

The growth camp also has plenty of intellectual support. Among the Brain Trust behind Dole's putative tax policy are a Nobel laureate (Gary Becker, from the University of Chicago), two Harvard professors (Robert Barro and Martin Feldstein), and one Stanford representative (John Taylor). Some of their thinking has also been echoed by a number of liberal economists—notably Lester Thurow, of M.I.T., in his new book, "The Future of Capitalism," and Thomas Palley, of the New School, in a cover story for the July issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Thurow and Palley favor interest-rate reductions instead of tax cuts, but they agree with Dole's professors that what the country needs is a more expansionary economic policy.

Two assumptions underlie the go-for-growth argument—that the rate of economic expansion has been unusually slow in the last few years, and that the growth rate can be raised by carrying out a few simple changes in economic policy. Both are questionable.

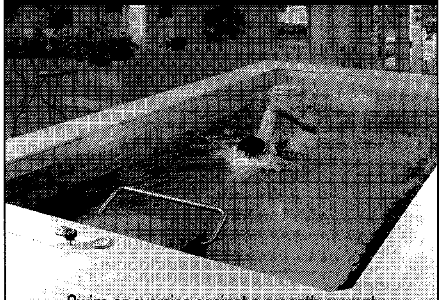
Although few people appear to have noticed, the economy is currently enjoying one of its most rapid growth spurts in recent years. According to figures released last week, between April and June of this year real gross domestic product grew at an annualized rate of more than four per cent—up from a rate of two per cent in the first quarter. While Dole was preparing his tax-cutting plan, Wall Street was panicking about growth already being too high. Last month's stock-market jitters can be traced, in part, to fears that the Federal Reserve Board, at its meeting later this month, will raise interest rates in order to rein back growth. Most experts believe that the economy will slow down a little in the next few months, but, even so, it appears likely that the real (i.e., inflation-adjusted) growth rate for the whole of 1996 will be around three per cent. If so, that would almost match the growth rate that turned the country into an economic superpower. Over the last hundred years, according to the best figures we have, the real gross domestic product grew at an average annual rate of about 3.1 per cent. Thanks to the magic of compounding, this growth rate translated into the economy's doubling in size every twenty-two years and ending up more than twenty times as big as it was a century ago.

To be sure, this year's growth rate is higher than it has been in recent years. The average annual growth rate during the four years of the Clinton Administration has been about 2.7 per cent (provided that the three-per-cent figure for this year holds up), which is well below the 3.1-per-cent historic average. However, it is important to look at recent performance in context. Since 1973, when the first OPEC crisis erupted, the economy has grown at an annual rate of just two and a half per cent. Why this slowdown occurred is still something of a mystery, but it was a global phenomenon affecting all the major industrial countries, and it has lasted long enough to establish itself as a new norm rather than as a historical aberration. Indeed, most economists now believe that it is the immediate postwar era, and not the period since 1973, that was unusual, and that the figure of two and a half per cent now represents the long-term (or "potential") growth rate of the United States economy. Looked at in this light, a growth rate of 2.7 per cent over these four years would represent slightly above-average growth.

If the economy were to keep growing at this pace in the future, gross domestic product, which is now more than $7.5 trillion (that is $7,500,000,000,000), would reach $10 trillion (in today's dollars) in 2007 and $20 trillion in 2032. And by 2096, a century hence, the economy's output would total about $107.5 trillion a year—a number whose vastness is difficult to comprehend. One way to grasp it is to figure out what would happen to the amount of gross domestic product available for each person in the country under this scenario. Assuming that the population were to continue to expand by about one percentage point each year, per-capita gross domestic product would increase from its current level of about $28,500 to about $153, 500 in a hundred years' time. That may not satisfy Steve Forbes and Jack Kemp, but our great-great-grandchildren would be a lot better off than we are.

As is always true of economic statistics, there are many ways to add up the figures. Some advocates of a need for faster growth base their arguments on the period from 1990 onward, which includes the 1990-91 recession, and point out that during the past six years growth has averaged only about two per cent. This is true, but the most objective way to judge an economy's performance is to look at its average growth rate between similar stages in successive business cycles; otherwise, the numbers are distorted by cyclical upswings and downswings. By adopting this approach, and comparing 1996 with 1988—when the economy was also in the late stages of a recovery and the unemployment rate dipped below five and a half per cent—we find that the annual rate of growth during the last eight years has been about 2.3 per cent. That is slightly lower than the average growth rate since 1973, but a difference of two-tenths of a per cent is a rather weak foundation on which to base a Republican Presidential campaign—especially since most of the shortfall occurred while George Bush was in office.

What is more, all these calculations are based on the assumption that the Commerce Department measures growth correctly. In fact, because of a statistical problem involving the consumer price index, the official figures underestimate the actual rate of growth—the error is about two-thirds of one per cent a year, according to David Wyss, an economist at DRI/McGraw-Hill. This may sound trivial, but it implies that the rate of growth over the past decade has been close to three per cent, rather than two and a half per cent. If this measurement error has been in place for the past twenty-three years, then national output is almost one-sixth larger relative to what it was in 1973 than the official figures say. This doesn't mean that growth hasn't



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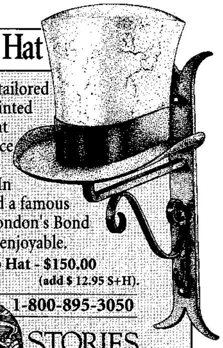

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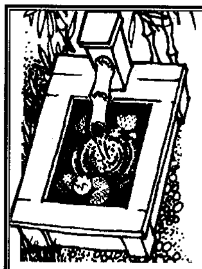

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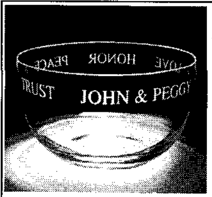

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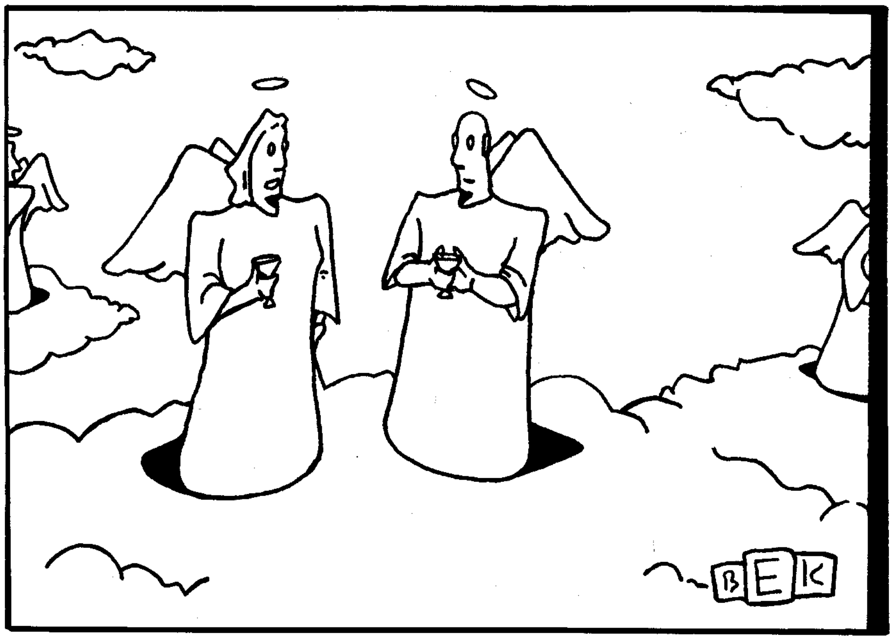

"Gee, you're not at all like your obituaries."

• •

slowed down since 1973, but it does mean that we are quite a bit richer, compared with our parents, than people think.

THE second assumption behind the go-for-growth argument—that the rate of expansion can be raised quickly by a few simple changes in economic policy—has some validity, but only in the short term. If a President Dole were to slash federal taxes by fifteen per cent, or Alan Greenspan were to cut the short-term interest rate from five and a quarter per cent to three and a half per cent, then, other things being equal, the economy might well grow at four per cent or five per cent for a year or so as consumers and businesses rushed out to spend the extra cash in their coffers. We know from elementary Keynesian economics, after all, that in the short run the level of output is determined by the level of demand. But the rapid growth in output would almost certainly not last. Both prices and wages would surely rise in such a heated marketplace, which, if unchecked, could start an inflationary spiral. More likely, the Fed would quickly raise interest rates and bring the growth spurt to an end.

In the long run, the economy cannot grow faster than its physical capacity will allow it to, and there is persuasive evidence that the productive potential of the economy is expanding at no more than 2.5 per cent a year. In a country operating at or close to full employment, there are only two ways an economy can grow: one is by increasing the size of its labor force (so that there are more people to make things), and the other is by increasing the productivity of each worker. For the past fifteen years, the American labor force has been growing at an annual rate of 1.4 per cent, and the total output per worker has been increasing at an annual rate of about 1.1 per cent. Add the increased output of the new and old workers and you get a potential growth rate of about two and a half per cent. (The White House official estimate of potential growth over the next seven years is actually a bit lower than two and a half per cent, because it thinks that growth in the labor force is slowing.)

If we tried to grow faster than this for an extended period, the first thing that would happen is that unemployment would start to fall, as firms reacted to higher demand by hiring more workers. According to an established rule of thumb known as Okun's Law (named after the late Arthur Okun, who was the president of the Council of Economic Advisers under Lyndon Johnson), for every percentage point that the economy grows above its potential rate the unemployment rate falls by half a percentage point. This means that if the economy were to grow at a rate of three and a half per cent for the next four years—one per cent above the potential rate—the jobless rate would fall by two per cent over that period (half a per cent each year). Given that unemployment currently stands at 5.4 per cent, this implies that by July of the year 2000 the rate would have dropped to 3.4 per cent—a rate that was last achieved in May of 1969.

To say that this is a realistic possibility defies thirty years of economic history. Unemployment is already at its lowest level in six years, and attempting to push it much lower would almost certainly prove futile. Ever since Milton Friedman's 1967 presidential address to the American Economics Association, most economists have accepted his argument that there is a limit to how far unemployment can fall—a limit that Friedman termed the Natural Rate of Unemployment, and which is often called full employment. Attempts to force the economy below that rate will produce only temporary increases in growth at a cost of rapidly rising inflation. Friedman has had some dubious things to say about economic methodology and the ethics of capitalism, but his insight about inflation and unemployment has been confirmed countless times in countries all over the world where governments tried to run their economies at unrealistically high levels of demand only to see unemployment fall to unsustainably low levels and inflation soar.

Most economists believe that the current rate of unemployment is already at, or even below, the full-employment level, and so there is little room for extra growth without rising inflation. Some White House officials, and a number of economists, argue that the Natural Rate of Unemployment may have dropped somewhat, because of workers' willingness to accept low wage increases in return for increased job security, but virtually no reputable economist believes that it has dropped to the three-and-a-half-to-four-per-cent range—the level necessary to make substantially higher growth sustainable. Inflation is low and unthreatening at the moment—the inflation hysteria on Wall Street is just that—but if unemployment were to fall much further prices would certainly start to rise, and we would end up with higher inflation, not higher growth.

Liberal critics like Thurow sidestep these issues by simply assuming that low interest rates and high demand would boost *productivity* growth back to the nearly three-per-cent rates that the country enjoyed between 1960 and 1973, which would enable the economy to grow at rates of four per cent and above. That is always possible, but the experience of the last few years, when the growth rate of productivity has, if anything, slowed down slightly, is far from encouraging. The arguments of the right are even more suspect. The liberals can at least argue that their ultra-Keynesian ideas have not been tried for almost three decades. The conservatives have no such excuse. Ronald Reagan's tax cuts failed to raise tax receipts, failed to raise savings and investment, failed to raise the growth rate of the labor force, failed to raise the growth rate of productivity, and failed to raise the economy's long-term growth rate. Why the results should be any different this time around is something that Bob Dole, hitherto a skeptic of supply-side economics, has yet to explain.

Nonetheless, Dole's adoption of tax cuts and pro-growth rhetoric leaves the White House in a tricky position. Many Administration economists believe that the arguments make no sense, but they are understandably reluctant to challenge the growth proponents in public. As one senior official said to me, "The problem is how to recognize and explain that they are nuts without sounding like you are recommending root canals."

THE best bet for future prosperity may be a continuation of divided government. The uneasy compromise between a Democratic White House, a Republican Congress, and an independent Federal Reserve Board frustrates politicians, but it prevents wild swings in taxation and public spending. As a result, the Fed can manipulate interest rates in order to keep demand growing at or close to the economy's potential growth rate. There is always the chance that some day the long-awaited benefits of corporate restructuring and information technology actually will pay off in a higher rate of productivity, which, in turn, would raise the potential growth rate. (Some economists believe that this is about to happen, but there is little statistical evidence of it so far.)

If we must experiment with radical policies, we might consider taxing consumption in order to encourage saving and investment, or enforcing a rigorous national-education curriculum as a way to eventually increase the productivity of American workers. Such policies would take a long time to achieve results, but, unlike the quick fixes of the Economic Growth Party, they will do no harm. ♦

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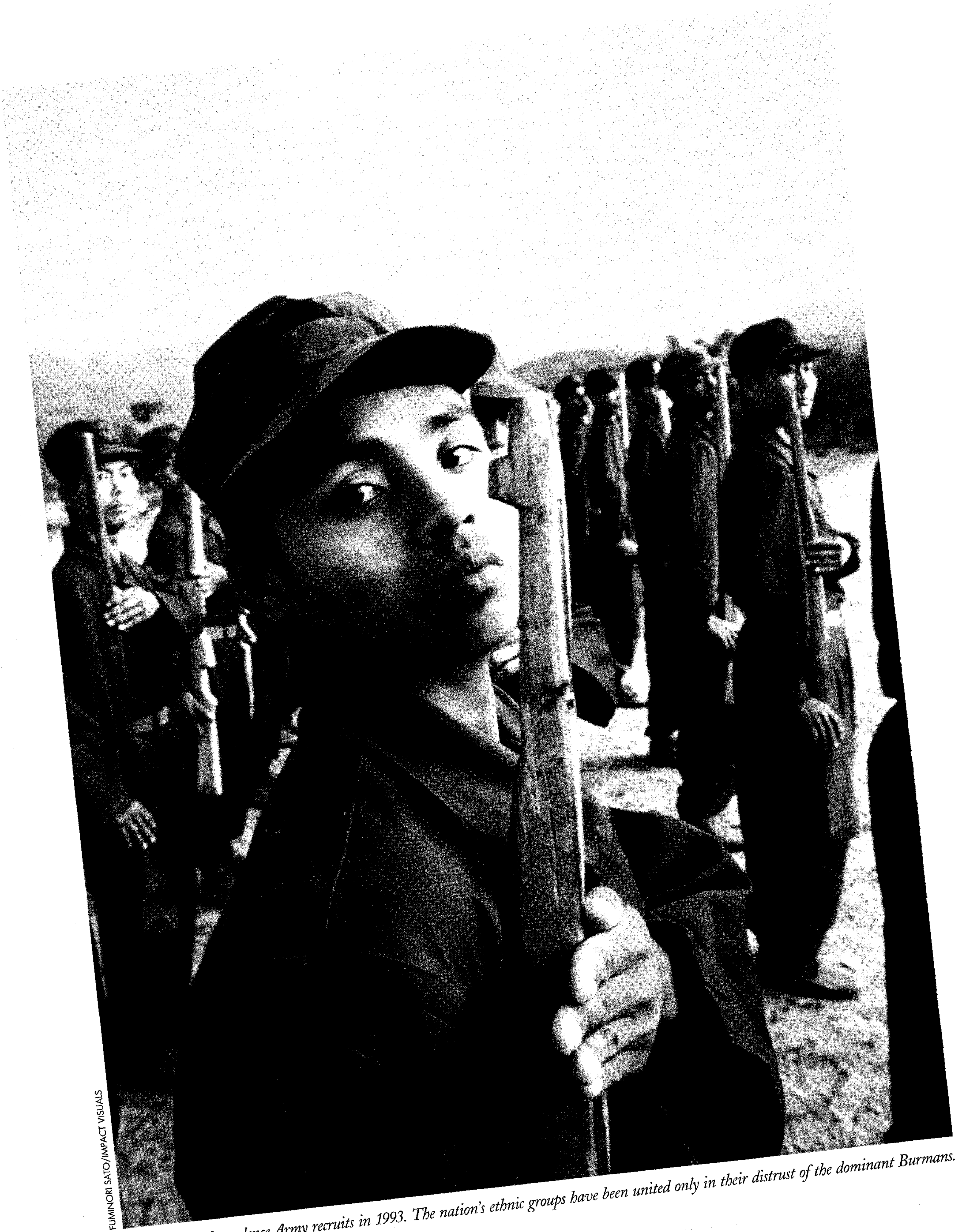
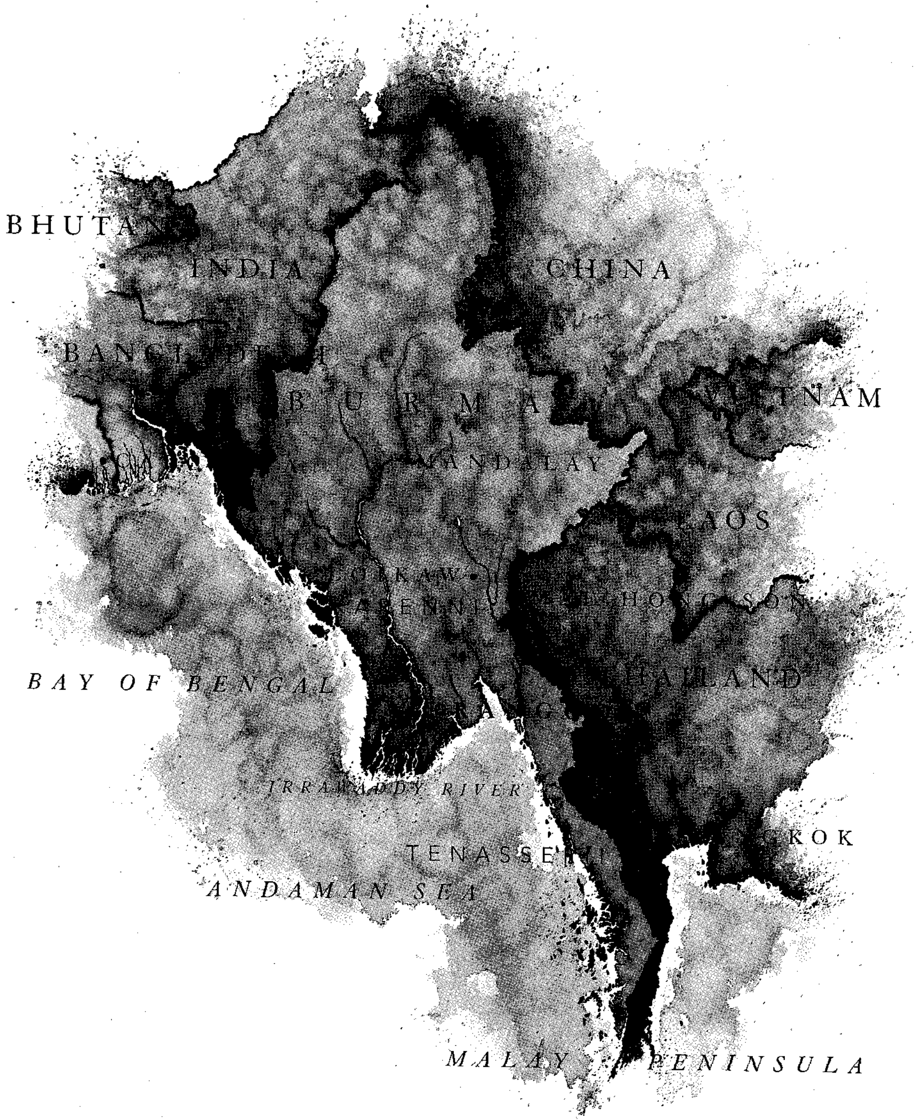


FUMINORI SATO/IMPACT VISUALS

Kachin Independence Army recruits in 1993. The nation's ethnic groups have been united only in their distrust of the dominant Burmans.

MIKE REAGAN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A REPORTER AT LARGE

BURMA

It is one of Asia's most magical countries. And its most mysterious: for three decades, there has been little news of life inside its sealed borders. The author discovers the stories that have been hidden from us.

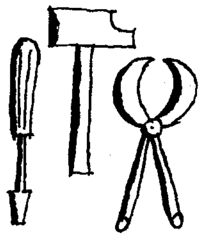
BY AMITAV GHOSH

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Like many Indians, I grew up on stories of other countries: places my parents and relatives had lived in or visited before the birth of the Republic of India, in 1947. To me, the most intriguing of these stories were those that my family carried out of Burma. I suspect that this was partly because Burma had become a kind of lost world in the early sixties, when I was old enough to listen to my relatives' stories. It was in 1962 that General Ne Win, the man who would be Burma's longtime dictator, seized power in a coup. Almost immediately, he slammed the shutters and switched off the lights: Burma became the dark house of the neighborhood, huddled behind an impenetrable, overgrown fence. It was to remain shuttered for almost three decades.

In retrospect, I am astonished by the

degree to which the Ne Win regime succeeded in cutting the country off, even from the attention of its immediate neighbors. Burma is one of the larger countries in Southeast Asia, with a land area considerably greater than that of Thailand and a population of an estimated forty-six million. It hangs mango-shaped between India, China, and Thailand, with the province of Tenasserim trailing like a tendril down the Andaman Sea. Its border with India is hundreds of miles long. Calcutta, where I was born, is closer to Burma's principal urban centers, Rangoon and Mandalay, than it is to New Delhi. Yet, while other neighboring countries—Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka—figured in our newspapers to the point of obsession, Burma was scarcely mentioned. In defiance of the laws of proximity, General Ne Win was able to render his country invisible to both its neighbors and the world at large.



In my family, memories of Burma were kept alive by an old connection, and last December, on travelling to Rangoon, I found a trace of that connection in a small, nondescript temple in the commercial center of the city. The temple stands on a broad, straight road that was once known as Spark Street; it is now called Bo Aung Kyaw Street. This part of Rangoon was planned and built by British engineers in the late nineteenth century, and Spark Street still has a dark, gaslit Victorian feel to it.

The temple on Spark Street is merely a hall on the ground floor of an old apartment building. It was built in 1887 and has served ever since as a community center for Hindu immigrants from Bengal. I had heard about the temple as a child, from an aunt who had married into a wealthy Bengali family that had settled in Burma. My aunt's husband ran a prosperous timber business. He was nicknamed the Prince because of his extravagant tastes. My aunt and the Prince left Burma in 1942, in the last, panic-stricken weeks before the Japanese Army marched into Rangoon. They managed to bribe their way onto a ship that was sailing for Calcutta.

The couple settled in Calcutta, and the Prince went back into the timber business. He was a distinguished-looking man, aquiline and ruddy-cheeked, always dressed in a starched cotton kurta and dhoti. In my earliest memories, he is a figure of truly princely munificence, driving up in his chauffeured Studebaker to sweep his relatives off to the most expensive shops in the city. This was not the way people did things in Calcutta; it was the Burmese side of him, and, in the semi-socialist India of that time, it couldn't last. He began to slide down the economic scale, slowly at first and then with gathering speed. By the time I was old enough to talk to him, his cars were gone, and he was living in a small fourth-floor flat in a part of Calcutta where almost everyone was a refugee from somewhere or other; he just happened to be from farther away than most.

The flat was crammed with books—from Mickey Spillane to Knut Hamsun. The Prince read voraciously and eclectically, mainly in English—a language I never heard him speak. When I went to visit him, he would lay aside his books and talk of Burma.

"It was a golden land," he would say. "The richest country in Asia except for Japan. There are no people on earth to compare with the Burmese—so generous, so hospitable, so kind to strangers. No one goes hungry in Burma: you just have to ask and someone will feed you."

In college, I discovered that the picture was not quite so simple. Indians had settled in Burma in large numbers in the late nineteenth century, after the British completed their conquest of the country. Indians had occupied a disproportionate number of government posts, and Indian merchants and moneylenders had come to dominate crucial sectors of the country's economy. I argued with the Prince. "But Indians were bitterly resented in Burma, weren't they?" I'd say. "Burmese nationalism practically started with anti-Indian riots."

He acknowledged this with a nod and a shrug. "But that's just one part of the story," he'd say. "There was a lot of friendship, too." Then his eyes would light up again: "Ah, but it was a golden land. . . ." It is impossible, I suspect, to imagine oneself being resented by a place to which one has given such unreserved love.

Neither the Prince nor my aunt ever returned to Burma, but my father, who had visited them there, went back once. The year was 1945, and he was an officer serving in the Allied Fourteenth Army. As the Allied forces advanced on Rangoon from the north, my father found himself both amazed and appalled by the scale of the destruction around him. The British had adopted a scorched-earth policy when they withdrew from Burma in 1942, demolishing bridges, setting fire to oil fields, and blocking the Irrawaddy's navigation channels with scuttled ships. Three years later, the retreating Japanese had reciprocated, destroying all that was left of Burma's infrastructure. "When buffaloes fight," goes a Burmese proverb, "the grass gets trampled." By the end of the war, after two bitterly fought campaigns, Burma was a devastated country.

My father found Rangoon virtually unrecognizable, but on making his way to Spark Street he discovered that the temple had survived, and he was able to trace a few distant relatives who had remained in the neighborhood. They would have starved, they told him later, but for the Army rations he steered their way.

On the evening of my visit, the temple was all but empty: a handful of elderly men were seated around a table in the neon-lit hall. I went up to them and earned a warm welcome by mentioning the Prince's family name. Soon, as I sat with them around the table, the conversation turned to prewar Burma, and I found myself listening to echoes of the Prince's voice, intoning the very same words: "A golden land, the richest country in Asia, the envy of its neighbors, the kindest, most hospitable people on earth—even now, when everything is so scarce . . ."

How did it all go wrong? I asked. Fifty years earlier, Burma had been the most developed country in the region, with an impressive agricultural surplus and a superabundance of natural resources—oil, timber, minerals. It had had an important petroleum industry, a highly educated population, almost universal adult literacy, a lively independent press, a rich literary culture, and a framework of democratic institutions. Now it was one of the most impoverished countries in the world's fastest-developing region, one of the United Nations' ten least-developed nations on earth, and a byword for repression, xenophobia, and civil abuse. How could any country travel so far back so fast?

The man seated next to me tapped my arm. He was well over seventy, a thin, upright man with a thatch of white hair. I shall call him Mr. Bose. Mr. Bose led me to the temple's entrance and pointed across the street, toward the dark, unlit compound of the Secretariat Building, a sprawling complex of decaying red brick offices, built by the British at the turn of the century. "Do you see that veranda there?" he said, pointing to one on a second-floor walkway. "That was where Burma's future ended. Do you see that door? It leads to the room where General Aung San was assassinated, on July 19, 1947. I was just down the corridor—I saw his body lying there."

I had often heard my father speak of General Aung San: he had met him once at an Army barracks in Rangoon during the war. General Aung San had said very little—he was famously a man of few words—but he had made a powerful impression on everyone present. He was twenty-nine years old at the time, a strikingly good-looking young man, with high cheekbones, a receding hairline, and a good-humored twinkle in his eye.

Despite his youth, Aung San was the country's acknowledged leader, the hero of its independence movement. A few years before, as a young student-politician, he had fled from British-ruled Burma and received military training from the Japanese. He was instrumental in organizing a militia of Burmese nationals in Thailand. In 1942, he marched back across the border at the head of the Burma Independence Army, accompanying the invading Japanese forces. Later, increasingly distrustful of the Japanese, he and his soldiers switched loyalties and joined the Allies. At the end of the war, it was widely believed that General Aung San would assume Burma's leadership once the British granted the country its independence, in 1948.

Aung San was by birth a Burman, and thus a member of the country's largest ethnic group. The Burmans are predominantly Buddhist, and form two-thirds of the country's population. There are four sizable minorities—the Karen, the Rakhine, the Shan, and the Mon—and many smaller groups. Some are Buddhist, and are linked with the people of neighboring Thailand. Others, such as the Kachin, the Karen, and the Karenni, include Christians, mainly from families that were converted by American Baptist missionaries in the nineteenth century. And in the west there is also a substantial Muslim population.

What these different minorities have had in common, historically, is a fear of being dominated by the Burmans. Aung San, uniquely, was able to transcend this historical mistrust of Burman politicians: it probably helped that he was married to a Christian, Daw Khin Kyi, although he himself was a Buddhist.

In April, 1947, Burma's colonial administration held elections to choose the government that would assume power when the country became independent. Aung San led his party, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, to a resounding electoral victory. He was thirty-two; he had been married nearly five years and had fathered three children. The youngest, Suu Kyi, was two years old.

The events of July 19, 1947, were fresh in Mr. Bose's memory, kept alive by years of telling and retelling. He was then working as a clerical superintendent in the colonial administration. His job required him to sit at a desk in a large hall, overseeing a team of clerks. General Aung San and his kitchen cabinet were meeting in a room down the corridor; Mr. Bose knew that room well, for he often delivered files there.

Mr. Bose was sitting at his desk at ten-fifteen on the morning of July 19th when he heard an earsplitting noise. He looked up to find himself staring at a roomful of startled clerks. Then he heard feet thudding along the corridor and down the stairs. It took a moment before he realized that the earsplitting noise had been gunfire. By the time Mr. Bose reached the door, a crowd had gathered there. The room was full of smoke. Standing on tiptoe, he counted nine bodies inside, some sprawled on the floor, some slumped over a table. Six members of the cabinet had died with General Aung San. They were among the country's most respected politicians, and included some of its most important minority leaders. Mr. Bose looked down and saw a thin trickle of blood winding past his feet.

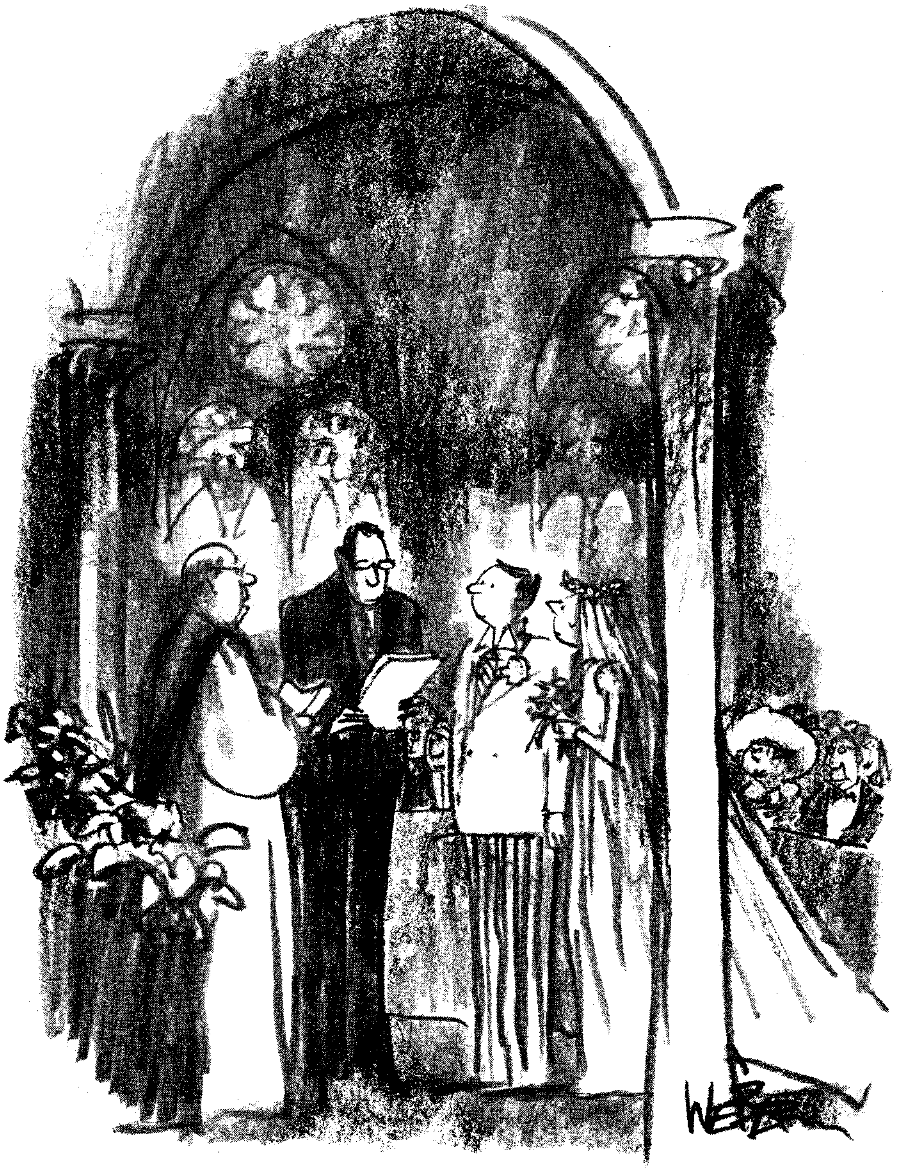
Mr. Bose learned that a group of men dressed in battle fatigues had driven into the Secretariat compound in two jeeps, through the entrance on Dalhousie Street. They had run directly to the cabinet room, carrying guns; they had known exactly where to go. The soldiers ran back the way they had come, jumped into their jeeps, and drove away through the same gate. That was the last that was ever heard of them, although several suspects were rounded up and a right-wing politician was later charged with the assassination and hanged.

This is the end, Mr. Bose thought as he stood in the corridor, looking into the bloody room. Nothing will ever be the same again.

"Can you imagine the consequences in India or China if this had happened to Nehru and his Cabinet or to Mao and the Politburo?" Mr. Bose said to me. "That's something you have to remember when you think of Burma."

The new Union of Burma attained its independence on schedule, in January, 1948. U Nu, a trusted friend of Aung San's who had assumed the leadership of the Party

"You only think you're barking at nothing. We're all barking at something."



"Before I pronounce you man and wife, a brief message from Archer Daniels Midland."

after the General's assassination, was sworn in as Burma's first Prime Minister.

Three months later, civil war broke out, with a vast Communist uprising. Serious ethnic insurgencies started the following year, when a group of Karen soldiers seized an armory on the outskirts of Rangoon and dug themselves in against government troops. Two Karen regiments of the Burma Army then mutinied, and they were soon joined by a regiment of Kachins.

In colonial times, British recruiting policies had favored minority groups over the ethnic Burmans. The British Burma Army was formed largely of units such as the Karen Rifles and the Kachin Rifles. As a result, the civil war began with the insurgents outnumbering government troops, and they made short work of the government's inexperienced, understaffed official Army. They captured Mandalay, Burma's second city, within six weeks, and then advanced on Rangoon, the capital, which was already under siege, caught between Communist insurgents and Karen rebels. A year after independence, the authority of the Burmese government extended no farther than the city's outskirts. The administration came to be nicknamed the Rangoon Six-Mile Government. It survived largely because an arms shipment from India arrived just in time to supply the government's troops.

In the following decades, the people of Burma learned to live with quotidian violence on a scale unimaginable elsewhere until the global advent of terrorism. The notoriously phlegmatic writer Norman Lewis travelled through Burma in 1951 and found that guerrilla warfare had become so widespread as to be commonplace: bridges were demolished within hours of being rebuilt; railway tracks were repaired and blown up at clockwork intervals; trains and riverboats were fired upon with mechanical regularity. "In the situation of this unfortunate country," he wrote, "there is an element of grim Wellsian prediction come to fulfillment."

General Aung San may indeed have been the only Burmese leader who could have averted the civil war. A few months before his death, he had negotiated a landmark treaty with several minority groups, having been able to persuade them that their rights would be protected in a quasi-federal union. The treaty, known as the Panglong Agreement, laid the groundwork for what could well have been a viable federal union. With General Aung San's assassination, the agreement foundered.

In his death, General Aung San became Burma's most pervasive icon. It is easy to imagine that the people of Rangoon, beset on every side by civil strife, needed a symbol to remind them that Burma was more than a flag and a fantasy—that an eventual Union of Burma was indeed thinkable, even achievable. Aung San became the embodiment of that possibility. For, despite the strains of the civil war, Burma clung fast to its parliamentary constitution: through the next decade, elections were held regularly, and the press flourished.

Then, in 1962, General Ne Win, the chief of the Army, abruptly took control of the government and suspended the constitution. The new regime met with immediate civilian resistance. Students sealed off Rangoon University and declared it a "fortress of democracy." The police opened fire, killing an unknown number; blew up the student-union building; and then closed the university. Many students went underground; many fled to insurgent-controlled areas on the border.

Soon after General Ne Win took power, it was announced that the ideology of the new regime was to be "the Burmese Way to Socialism." The General had a history of peculiar behavior, and soon became famous for his tantrums and an obsession with the number nine. He was said by many to be mad, and had undergone psychiatric treatment in Vienna. His professed ideology proved to be no ideology at all, but a bizarre mix of xenophobia and astrology, with a smattering of Marxism. General Ne Win's one claim to legitimacy was a connection to Aung San, who had once been his comrade-in-exile, and the General made the most of the link. As the reality of Burma grew ever more distant from Aung San's vision, his image proliferated: on coins and banknotes, on street corners, in marketplaces.

It takes a military dictator to believe that symbols are inert and can be manipulated at will. Forty years after his assassination, Aung San had his revenge. In a strange, secular reincarnation, his daughter, Suu Kyi, came back to haunt those who had sought to make use of his death. In 1988, when Burma's decades of discontent culminated in an anti-military uprising, Aung San Suu Kyi (pronounced Awng-Sahn-Soo-Chee) emerged from obscurity as one of the country's most powerful voices, the personification of Burma's democratic resistance to military rule.

A PENGUIN ON AN ICE FLOE

The first time I met Suu Kyi was in 1980, at Oxford, where I was then a graduate student. I had been given a package for her by a mutual friend in New Delhi; Suu Kyi went to high school and college in Delhi before going on to Oxford. She still has many friends in India. Her mother served as Burma's Ambassador to India for several years.

In 1980, Suu Kyi was thirty-five, and was leading a life of quiet, exiled domesticity on a leafy street in North Oxford, bringing up two sons, then aged seven and three, and writing occasional articles for scholarly journals.

I saw her next in a magazine photograph, eight years later: she was speaking into a microphone. It was August 26, 1988, and she was addressing a vast crowd in the shadow of the great golden spire of the Shwedagon Pagoda, in Rangoon. She was instantly recognizable and yet utterly transformed.

I learned later that her presence in Burma was largely fortuitous. In the course of a peripatetic life, spent in many countries abroad, Suu Kyi had returned regularly to visit her aging mother in Rangoon, and news that she had suffered a stroke was what brought Suu Kyi back in 1988.

Mass protests against military rule had started a couple of weeks before Suu Kyi arrived in Rangoon. In March, a brawl in a tea shop provoked a clash between university students and riot police, and forty-one students died of suffocation while being detained in a police van. The students responded by taking to the streets in protest against the regime. The demonstrations continued over several weeks. Three months later, in June, student protests erupted again, eventually forcing the resignation of General Ne Win. The scale of the protests increased after the dictator's departure, culminating in a nationwide general strike on August 8th: in commemoration of this day, many Burmese still refer to the democracy agitation as the Four Eights Movement, because of the date—8/8/88. Thousands of people—not just students but teachers, monks, children, doctors, and workers of all kind—joined the demonstrations. That day, the Army made its first determined attempt to crush the movement, and hundreds of unarmed demonstrators were shot dead. The killings went on for a week, but demonstrators continued to flood the streets.

Pictures of General Aung San were a prominent feature of the student-led demonstrations. He had himself begun his political career as a student leader, and the generation that formed the nucleus of the democracy movement was quick to lay claim to his legacy. Suu Kyi's family house, on University Avenue, became a center of political activity, and on August 26th, in her speech at the Shwedagon Pagoda, she announced that she was joining the movement. "I could not, as my father's daughter, remain indifferent to all that was going on," she told the hundreds of thousands of people who had gathered to listen to her. "This national crisis could, in fact, be called the second struggle for national independence."

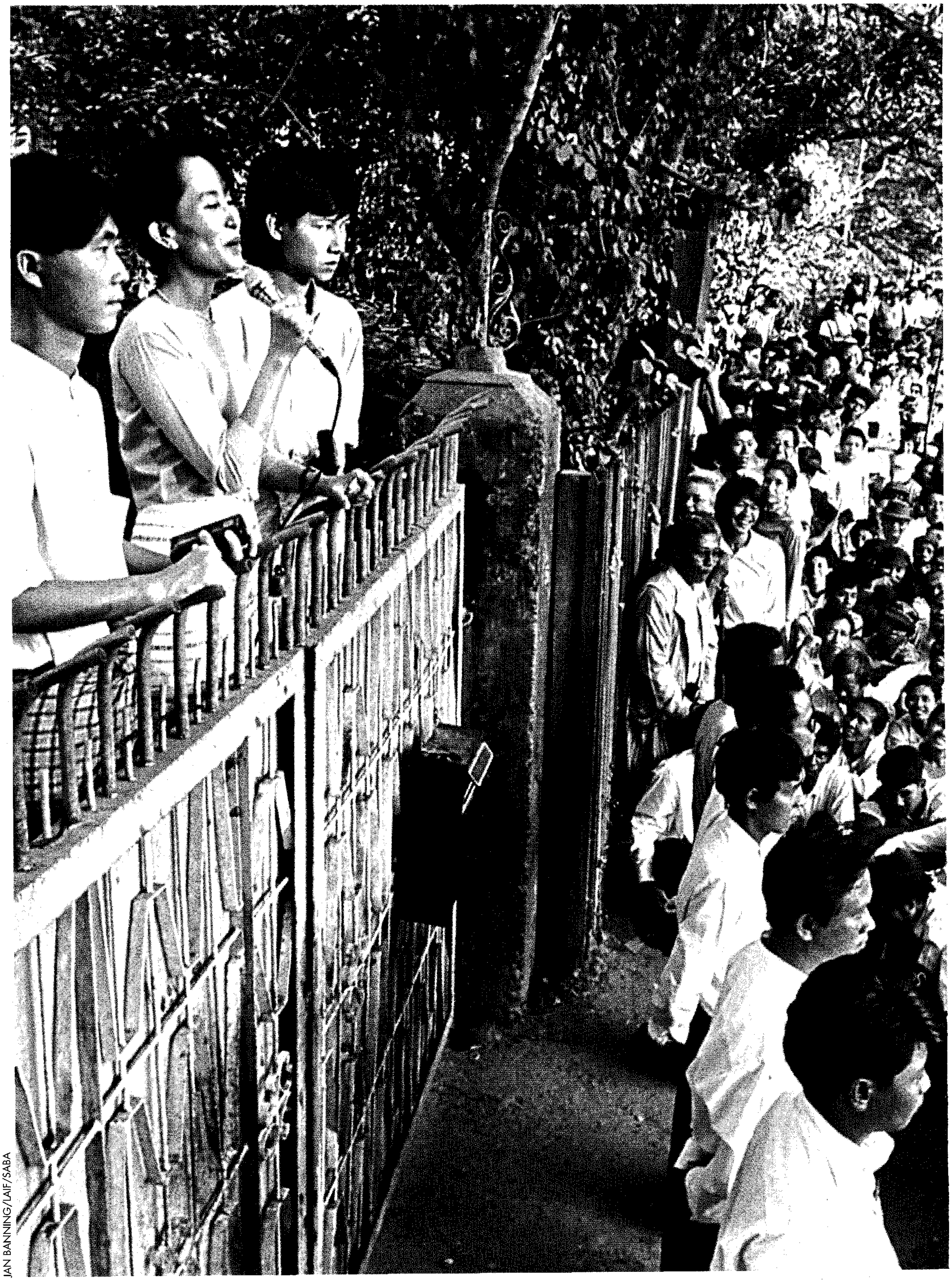
A bloody dénouement was a few weeks away. On September 18th, a group of senior military officers took over the government. The junta called itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council; it rules under that name to this day, although some of its senior members have changed. In Burma, the regime is universally referred to by the almost comically sinister acronym SLORC. The word is pronounced with an appropriately slurping, swallowing sound—"like Ian Fleming's SMERSH," as a diplomat once observed.

The junta's first move was to eliminate the democracy movement. Army units took control of the streets, machine-gunning any large gatherings, and arrested hundreds of activists. A mass exodus resulted: as many as six thousand students fled to insurgent-held areas on the border. Many joined the insurgents; some are still fighting.

Once SLORC had secured power, it announced that it would hold elections. In response, Suu Kyi and her associates formed a political party, the National League for Democracy. Over the next several months, Suu Kyi toured the country, campaigning. She drew vast crowds at every appearance, and her popularity became a matter of increasing concern for the new regime. On July 20, 1989, the day after the forty-second anniversary of her father's death, she was put under house arrest and barred from taking part in the elections. Her disenfranchisement did not have the effect the junta had hoped for. When elections were eventually held, the following year, her party won more than eighty per cent of the seats. Faced with the prospect of being ousted from power, SLORC ignored the result. Suu Kyi was offered safe passage out of the country on the condition that she never return. She chose to remain in Rangoon under house arrest and became the living symbol of Burma's predicament. In 1991, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but she was unable to collect it: she was still under detention.

Suu Kyi's house arrest ended on July 11, 1995. Within hours of the announcement, a crowd gathered outside her house. She made a brief appearance, but the crowd wanted more. A larger crowd gathered the next day and a still larger one the day after that, waiting in silent vigil until she appeared at the gates. After making such impromptu appearances for several days, Suu Kyi decided that her daily addresses were taking too much of her time, so she resolved to hold regular meetings on weekend afternoons instead. Thus was invented a unique political institution: Suu Kyi's gateside meetings in Rangoon.

Before travelling to Burma, I had often wondered how SLORC had succeeded in keeping its hold on power for the past eight years, despite the overwhelming popular support for Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy. The answers became evident once I was there. Military rulers in impoverished countries are frequently brutal, but they



JAN BANNING/LAIF/SABA

A gateside meeting at Aung San Suu Kyi's home; Suu Kyi's father, General Aung San (opposite), in 1947.

are rarely able to muster either the resources or the expertise required to operate complex systems of social control. Burma is an exception. Despite the country's meagre resources, its successive military regimes have succeeded in creating systems of surveillance that are unsurpassed in the scope of their intrusiveness.

To take just one example: every household in Burma must register its members with the local authority; no one may spend the night at another household without obtaining permission from the local ward chairman. Members of ethnic minorities frequently have difficulty registering changes in their "guestlists." In Rangoon, I met a woman who, after three years of wedlock, still had to queue for weekly permission to stay at her husband's apartment.

References in the press to poverty are automatically censored, and so are references to corruption, bribery, and even disease. "The censors live in a world of illusion," a well-known writer told me. "On the one hand, they know everything; they have informers everywhere. They know how much people earn, how much they spend. But in an authoritarian culture people lead two-track lives."

At the end of our harrowing conversation, I asked, "What would you write about if there were no censorship?"

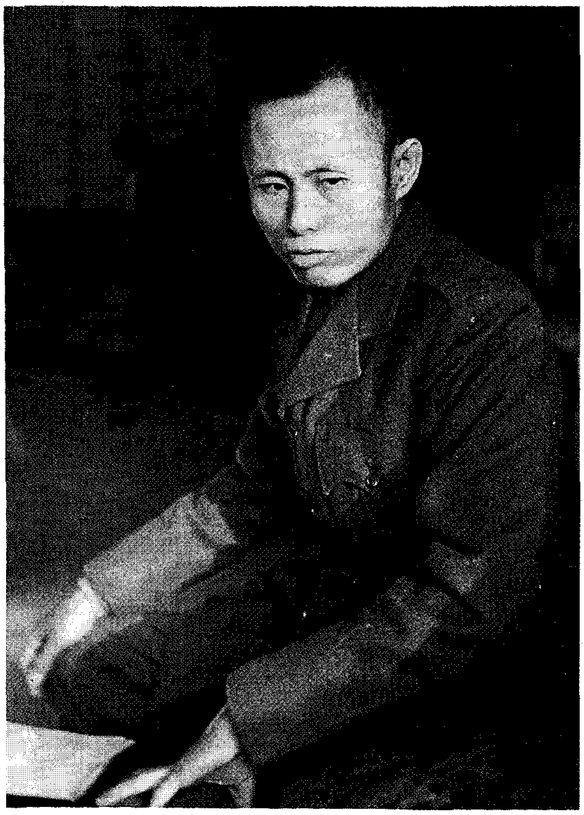
He threw up his hands in a gesture of helplessness. He had spent almost ten years in Burma's prisons, most of them in an island concentration camp, where he had had to forage for his food. "Since 1962, we have lived through the Dark Ages," he said. His voice shook as he tried to control his rage. "Torture, murder, poverty . . . I have never been able to write about any of these things."

The country's chief censoring body is the Press Scrutiny Board. Among the items that attracted its ire last year were two magazine covers: one featured a penguin on an ice floe, and the other pictured a young woman seated among fallen flowers; both were interpreted as oblique references to Suu Kyi.

A SECULAR REINCARNATION

THE first time I attended one of Suu Kyi's weekend meetings, early this year, I was taken aback by her public manner. I was startled by how much she laughed. At times, she would break up in giggles, with a hand over her mouth; at other times, she would laugh full-throatedly, throwing her head back. I had expected, I suppose, a certain solemnity of demeanor—if for no other reason than merely as an acknowledgment of the atmosphere of intimidation that surrounds those meetings. The people in the crowd didn't seem to care: they laughed with her, uproariously.

The meetings are held at four in the afternoon. Crowds start gathering at midday, and they vary in size from four thousand to ten thousand. Suu Kyi addresses them as she stands at her gate. People sit in orderly rows opposite her, hugging their *longyi*-shrouded knees, while venders hawk cheroots, betel, and skewers of blackened chicken. Vans, cars, and minibuses throng the avenue, squeezing slowly through the crowd. The passengers try to look nonchalant, but their composure dissolves once they spot Suu Kyi, and they smile and wave, craning their necks to get a full view. From time to time, intelligence men holding video cameras stand up and pan slowly over the crowd.



HULTON GETTY

The form of the meetings is simple. Suu Kyi answers written questions given to her by members of the crowd. The questions range from matters of food and health to politics and literature. On Sundays, she is joined by at least one senior member of her party, a reminder that the National League for Democracy is a party and not an individual.

University Avenue is a curving, tree-shaded street that skirts the picturesque Inya Lake. Suu Kyi's house, screened by a mass of unkempt greenery, is not visible from the street. When I later walked through the house's blue gates to meet her, I was surprised by how modest and dilapidated the building was: a plain but solid two-story bungalow, with a portico and veranda overlooking a garden and the lake.

I was shown to a large room on the ground floor. A portrait of her father hung on a flaking, mildewed wall, slightly askew. Close by was an orange banner bearing the symbol of the National League for Democracy—a fighting peacock. Through a barred window, I caught a glimpse of the lake, its sunbathed surface speckled with lotus pads.

When Suu Kyi entered the room, dressed, as usual, in a Burmese sarong, I knew why she had made such an impression on me when I first met her. It is not her beauty, although her beauty is considerable. It is that she emanates an almost mystical quality of solitude: not solemnity, for she is always animated, either laughing or driving a point home with an upraised finger, but a sovereign, inviolate aloneness.

I had prepared a long list of questions, but now, in her presence, I didn't know where to begin. The unexpectedly complicated business of entering her house had unsettled me: the taxi-driver who dropped me at a distance and sped away; the camera-wielding intelligence agents who loitered by her gate; the smiling policeman who inquired politely after the name of my hotel. After these sinister preliminaries, the normalcy of her house and the calm authority of her presence come almost as a jolt.

I glanced at my notes. Most of my questions were about her party's policies, SLORC's machinations, and so on. I knew now what her answers would be. She meets with foreign reporters almost daily, and her answers are unvarying; they could hardly be otherwise, considering how often the questions are repeated.

She never leaves any doubt about her opposition to foreign investment in Burma under the current regime, although at the time we spoke she stopped short of calling for economic sanctions. Also by implication, she is critical of attempts to lure tourists to Burma. She is unequivocal in her criticism of a so-called "constitutional convention" that was called by SLORC three years ago: the constitution that was proposed, she points out, would effectively institutionalize military rule, since it reserves a large proportion of seats for military appointees. At the same time, she is generally nonconfrontational in her references to the current regime; she rarely even uses the term SLORC, preferring to use the phrase "the authorities."

As I listened to these answers, I knew what I really wanted to ask: I wanted to know what it was like to be under house arrest for six years; what it meant to be separated from one's spouse and one's children; to be offered the option of leaving and turning it down. I thought of my own family, thousands of miles away, and the pain of even a brief separation; of the times I'd found myself looking at my watch and wondering whether my children were asleep or at play.

Her gateside meetings, I'd noticed, were attended by dozens of foreigners. Only a few were reporters and journalists; most were tourists and travellers. They were people like me, members of the world's vast, newspaper-reading middle class, people who took it for granted that there are no heroes among us. But Suu Kyi had proved us wrong. She lived the same kind of life, attended the same classes, read the same books and magazines, got into the same arguments. And she had shown us that the apparently soft and yielding world of books and words could sometimes forge a very fine kind of steel.

I, too, had come on a pilgrimage of sorts. What I really wanted to know was "Where did you find the courage to do what you have done? What gave you the strength?" And what could one possibly learn of this in an hour—or two hours, or even a hundred? It would take a poet or a novelist years of labor to find a way of understanding what she had done.

The futility of my prepared questions made them inevitable. "So many people around the world marvel at how you survived those years of house arrest," I said. "In a way, house arrest must be worse than prison—"

She interrupted me with a laugh. "Sometimes I thought it would be better in prison," she said, "because I wouldn't have to cope with keeping the house clean."

Every time it rained, she said, the roof sprang new leaks, and she had to run up and down the stairs positioning buckets. "It was a great nuisance. Sometimes I thought, I wonder if it leaks at Insein jail? Whether the prisoners have to run around with buckets to catch the leaks?"

"Did Buddhism help?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "Buddhist meditation helped because it created a sense of awareness and a sense of calm."

"What was it like," I asked, "the first time you saw your children after those years of house arrest?"

She paused to reflect. "I didn't see them together," she said. "My elder son came first, you see. He was fifteen when I last saw him, and he had already taken on his adolescent shape. But my younger son was eleven, and he was still a little boy. When I saw him again, he had changed completely. He had changed physically. If I had seen him out on the street, I would not have known he was my son. I was very happy that nothing had happened—that nothing had really affected the closeness between us."

She stopped. She evidently found it difficult, possibly distasteful, to talk about her family to a stranger. I felt that I had trespassed, in a small way. Like Suu Kyi, I was brought up to believe in the appropriateness of a strict separation between the public and the private, the political and the domestic. In this view, it is wrong as well as unseemly to reduce a vast political movement to the career of a single leader—to identify the aspirations of millions of people with the life of an individual.

The irony is that nothing better illustrates the passing of these values than Suu Kyi's predicament. In the postmodern world, politics is everywhere a matter of symbols, and the truth is that Suu Kyi is her own greatest political asset. It is only because Burma's 1988 democracy movement had a symbol, personified in Suu Kyi, that the world remembers it and continues to exert pressure on the current regime. Otherwise, the world would almost certainly have forgotten Burma's slain and dispersed democrats just as quickly as it has forgotten many others like them in the past.

The golf-playing generals who run Burma are, of course, well aware of this situation. If it were not for Suu Kyi and the increasingly vocal support for her abroad, SLORC's leaders would have scarcely a worry as they teed off on the links. Under house arrest, Suu Kyi was a living reproach to the regime, and a bar to many foreign investors. By releasing her, the junta achieved a minor propaganda coup.

SLORC is headed by four of the Burmese Army's senior generals. The man who is widely believed to be the brains behind the regime's adroit maneuverings over the last several years is Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, the longtime chief of Burma's intelligence apparatus and a political operator of formidable skill. After the events of 1988, SLORC moved quickly to "liberalize" the economy and invite foreign investment. No one knows exactly how much money the regime has attracted (the government claims to have got $3 billion), but the single largest investment is a billion-dollar gas pipeline financed by the French company Total and the American energy conglomerate Unocal.

SLORC takes particular pride in what it has done to end the forty-eight-year-old civil war with the country's ethnic insurgents. Again through shrewd political maneuvering, SLORC has forced many of the country's insurgents to negotiate. Fifteen groups have concluded ceasefire agreements with Rangoon, and the official press frequently claims that these agreements show that the insurgents have entered "the legal fold."

When I mentioned the ceasefires, Suu Kyi said, "There were reports in the Thai papers a couple of weeks ago that there is a constant flow of arms across the border, which indicates that the insurgents are continuing to accumulate arms. That does not sound very much as though they were preparing for permanent peace." I had already decided that I wanted to investigate the government's claims for myself.

In SLORC's official usage, Burma is now Myanmar, Rangoon is now Yangon, Karenni is now Kayah, and so on. But most of the people I spoke to used the old forms. As I was rising to leave, I asked Suu Kyi to resolve the dilemma; since she is effectively the country's elected leader, she had as good a right as anyone to decide what it should be called.

"I think it's very foolish," she said.

"The excuse [that the authorities] gave was that Burma was a colonial name and referred only to the Burmese people, and Myanmar included all the other ethnic groups. This is just not true. Myanmar is a literary form of *Bama*, which means Burmese. So what it is all about I do not know. Some people say it is *yedea*—a propitiatory rite, something to prevent bad fortune. The authorities believe a lot in astrology."

"Would you rather I used the old names?" I asked.

She laughed. "Yes, please use the old forms," she said. "As support for a sensible way of looking at things. I do not like narrow-mindedness. Even if these names were given by the British colonialists, so what? After all, India is called India, and not Bharat; and China is China. I think if you have enough confidence in yourself you should not worry about what you are called."

"Peters, make a joyful noise."

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AMONG THE INSURGENTS

Two days after my meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, I heard that fighting had broken out between the Burmese Army and a contingent of Karenni insurgents. The Karenni were supported by a regiment of dissident Burmese students, and the fighting was concentrated in a remote and mountainous border region adjoining northwestern Thailand. The official Burmese media had listed the Karenni among the groups that had been brought back into the legal fold through SLORC's ceasefire policy. There was no mention of any fighting.

I found myself wondering, What is Burma (or Myanmar, for that matter)? Who are the Karenni insurgents? What has driven them to fight so long, with such tenacity? Are the two aspects of Burma—the areas under the control of Rangoon and those claimed by the insurgents—really so distant from each other? I recalled an anecdote told to me by a senior diplomat in Bangkok, about Thailand's immensely revered monarch, King Bhumibol, who had personally overseen his country's passage to democracy. The King had remarked that an overhasty transition to democracy in Burma might produce a situation similar to the one in Bosnia, only worse. If this was so, what were the prospects of democracy in any multiethnic society?

When the Burmese offensive was in its second week, I flew to the border town of Mae Hong Son, in northwestern Thailand. It was a clear day, and I watched in awe as the red, riverine plains of the south changed into jagged, densely forested mountains, a pristine landscape of misted valleys and towering ridges. I could see no sign of any habitation until Mae Hong Son itself appeared suddenly in my window, a string of teakwood buildings nestled in a deep valley.

At first glance, Mae Hong Son seemed to be a quiet and prosperous frontier town. It was hard to imagine that a war was being fought in the surrounding mountains. I was surprised by the number of hotels on offer. I picked a Holiday Inn. From my room I glimpsed a turquoise swimming pool, ringed by European tourists sipping vividly colored drinks in umbrellaed glasses. Within half an hour, my contacts in Mae Hong Son, members of a Burmese student group, sent a guide to take me back across the Burma border into a Karenni-held area that was currently under attack.

We rented a motor scooter and went rattling off down a dirt track that ended at a village near the foot of the mountains. We waded across a stream and started climbing. It was about five in the afternoon, and the sun had already dipped behind a ridge. Following a steeply ascending trail, we stepped from twilight into the darkness of a densely canopied forest. Neither my guide nor I had thought to bring a flashlight; he was wearing rubber sandals and I a pair of thin-soled leather shoes.

I began to regret my precipitate departure from the Holiday Inn. Clawing at the undergrowth to keep from falling, I feared I would end up with a snake in my fist. By the time we stumbled into the students' base camp, hours later, exhaustion had erased every thought from my mind. It was all I could do to stay on my feet.

Half a dozen young guerrillas dressed in camouflage fatigues were squatting around a campfire by a bamboo hut, playing guitars. A heavyset, thickly bearded man detached himself from the group and stepped over to meet me. He introduced himself as the commander of the regiment. He looked me over as I sat panting on a rock. After a moment's hesitation, he asked, a little shyly, "Are you Indian?" I then noticed that his spoken English sounded oddly like my own. I nodded, and, through a veil of exhaustion, took another look at him. Suddenly, I sat up. "And you?" I asked.

"My parents were Indian," he said, with a smile. "But I'm Burmese."

After my ordeal in the jungle, I was not quite prepared for such an eminently postmodern encounter: my astonishment must have been evident in my face, for the commander began to laugh.

He was called Ko Sonny, but his given name, I learned, was Mahinder Singh. He was in his early thirties and had been "in the jungle" almost eight years. His family had been settled in Burma for three generations. His parents were born there; his father was Sikh and his mother Hindu, both from families of well-to-do Indian businessmen.

I was disconcerted listening to Sonny in the flickering firelight. I was sure that our relatives had known one another once in Burma: his had chosen to stay and mine hadn't. Except for a few years and a couple of turns of fate, each of us could have been in the other's place.

I spent the night on a bamboo pallet in Sonny's hut. The next day, I was jolted awake before dawn by the sound of a Burmese Army artillery barrage. After groping for a match, I stepped outside to find Sonny talking into a walkie-talkie. The Burmese Army had launched an assault on a Karenni position in an adjoining valley.

The fighting was a good distance away, but the sound of gunfire came rolling up the misted mountainside with uncanny clarity, the rattle of small-arms fire clearly audible in the lulls between exploding artillery shells. The noise sent flocks of parakeets shooting out of the mountainside's tangled canopy.

With daybreak, I had my first look at the camp—a string of thatched bamboo huts arranged along a mountain stream. A great deal of thought had gone into the camp's planning. The plumbing was far from rudimentary: water was piped directly into bathrooms and showers from a stream. There was a dammed pond teeming with fish and, nearby, a pen full of pigs.

Next to each hut was a vegetable patch. Once Sonny had ascertained that the fighting was not headed our way, he picked up a watering can and waded into a patch of bok choy. Following his lead, the others put aside their battle gear and disappeared into their pumpkin trellises and mustard beds, like a troop of Sunday gardeners.

"Growing food is as important to our survival as fighting," Ko Sonny explained apologetically. "We do this before we go on patrol."

We set out an hour or so later, a detachment of half a dozen student fighters, with Sonny in the lead. Once we had crossed the border, an unmarked forest trail, Sonny and his men reclaimed a cache of aging M-16s and slung them over their shoulders.

We climbed onto a ridge, where I found myself gazing at a majestic spectacle of forested gorges, mountain peaks, and a sky of crisp, pellucid blue. The shelling was sporadic now: occasionally the forest canopy would silently sprout a mushroom cloud of smoke, the accompanying blast climbing leisurely up the slope moments later.

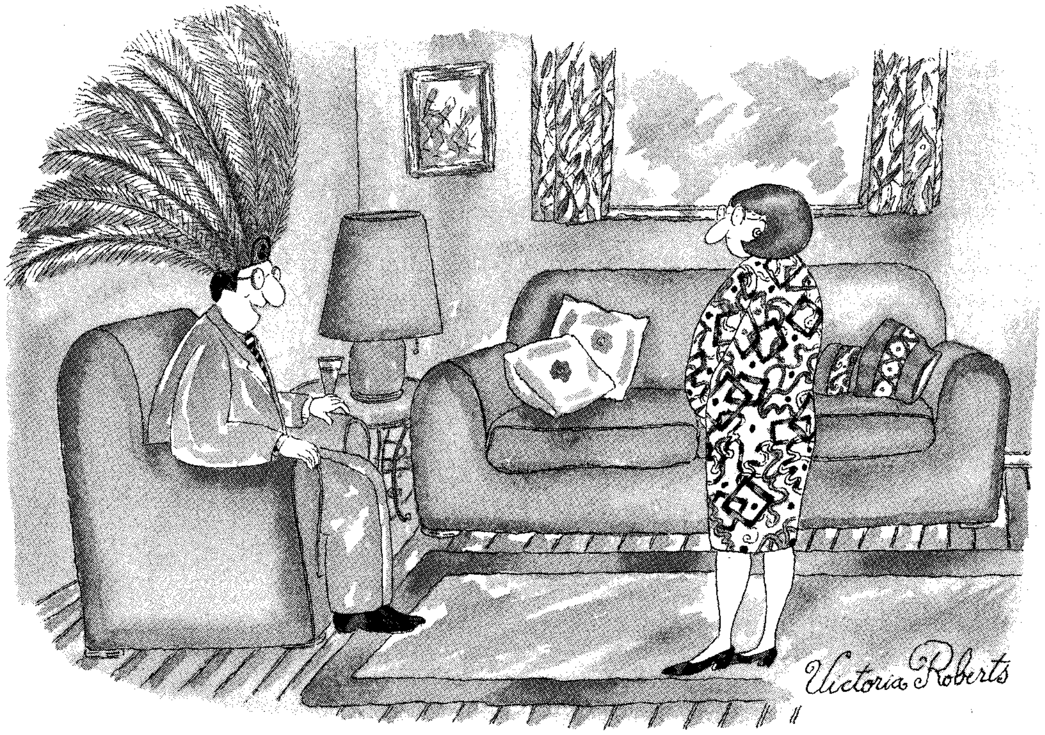
Mae Hong Son was clearly visible, a smudge in the floor of a tip-tilted valley. While Sonny counted off the calibre of the exploding shells—120 mm., 81 mm.—I turned his binoculars on the town and spotted my hotel.

Sonny pointed to the Karenni post we were to visit. It was called Naung Lon, and was built around a peak that reared high above the surrounding spurs and ridges. We entered through a gate hidden in a wall of bamboo stakes. After crossing a moat and a barbed-wire barrier, we made our way cautiously past a ring of heavily sandbagged gun emplacements and were met by a Karenni officer, a tall, stooped man with melancholy eyes and an air of regretful doggedness. The officer and his men, like most Karenni insurgents, were devout Christians. The officer himself happened to be a Baptist. His eyes flickered constantly as we spoke. His arm describing a semicircle, he pointed to the Burmese Army positions on the mountaintops around us. The Burmese Army had concentrated ten thousand men in the area, he explained. The Karenni army had a force of about six hundred. He knew that he was defending a hopeless position, and had already made plans to evacuate.

Later, on the way back to the student camp, I remarked to Sonny that I didn't see how the Karenni army could possibly escape defeat.

Sonny laughed. The Karenni, he pointed out, had been fighting against dire odds for fifty years. Many regarded the war against SLORC as a direct continuation of the war against the Japanese. Some Karenni families had been at war for three generations, and many of their fighters had spent their entire lives in refugee camps.

What does it take, I found myself wondering, to sustain an insurgency for fifty years, to



"I thought you *__liked__* *museum reproductions."*

go on fighting a war that the rest of the world has almost forgotten? What did "freedom" mean to the Karenni—democracy or simply the right to set up an ethnic enclave of their own?

THE next day, I returned to Mae Hong Son and went to see Mr. Abel Tweed, the Foreign Minister of the Karenni National Progressive Party, in his small back-alley office. A voluble square-jawed man, Mr. Tweed delved into a makeshift archive housed in a cupboard. "We have always been independent," he announced, "and we have the documents to prove it."

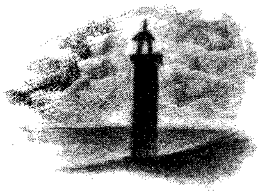
Leafing through the papers he handed me, I saw that he was right: the British had clearly recognized Karenni autonomy in the late nineteenth century and had rejected the option of annexing the Karenni territories to Burma proper. Their reasons were not altruistic. "It is evident that the country is perfectly worthless in itself," one British administrator wrote of the Karenni area. "It is almost impracticable, for even an elephant."

It was the Second World War that thrust the Karenni's "impracticable" country center stage. Looking for Asian partners in the struggle against the Japanese, the Allied powers encouraged several ethnic groups along the borders of Burma to rise against the occupying army. The Karenni, the Karen, and the Kachin eagerly embraced the Allies. A number of British and American military personnel took up residence in their villages, and some of them virtually assumed the role of tribal elders.

The Karenni, along with the Karen and the Kachin, were spectacularly effective guerrillas, and their loyalty proved to be important to the Allies. The repayment that these groups expected was independence. To this day, they nurture a bitter historical grievance that the debt was never paid.

Abel Tweed was born long after the war, but his voice shook as he talked of the British departure from Burma. "The British knew that the Karenni were not a part of Burma," he said. "But the Karenni are a small people; they forgot us."

There are six thousand or so displaced Karenni refugees, and they are divided among five camps. Until fairly recently, these camps were in Burma, on a narrow tract of land controlled by the insurgents, but the steady advance of Burmese troops has gradually pushed the camps back over the border into Thailand. The camps are now clustered around Mae Hong Son—a tourist town which promotes an activity known as "hill-tribe trekking." The camps have come to be linked to this tourist entertainment through an odd symbiosis. The women of one Karenni subgroup have traditionally worn heavy brass rings to elongate their necks, and these women are now ticketed tourist attractions, billed as "giraffe women": their refugee camps are a feature of the hill-tribe-trekking routes. In effect, tourism has transformed these camps, with their tragic histories of oppression, displacement, and misery, into counterfeits of timeless rural simplicity—waxwork versions of the very past that their inhabitants have irretrievably lost. Karenni fighters returning from their battles on the front lines become, as it were, mirrors in which their visitors can discover an imagined Asian innocence.



I HAD come to the border hoping to find that democracy would provide a solution to Burma's unresolved civil war. By the time I left, I was no longer sure what the solution could be.

"The majority of Burmans think that democracy is the only problem," a member of the powerful Kachin minority reminded me. "But ethnic groups took up arms when Rangoon had a democratic government. A change to democracy won't help. The outside world expects too much from Suu Kyi. From our point of view, we don't care who governs—the weaker the better."

There are thousands of putative nationalities in the world today; at least sixteen of them are situated on Burma's borders. It is hard to imagine that the inhabitants of these areas would be well served by becoming separate states. A hypothetical Karenni state, for example, would be landlocked, with the population of a medium-sized town: it would not be less dependent on its larger neighbors simply because it had a flag and a seat at the U.N.

Burma's borders are undeniably arbitrary, the product of a capricious colonial history. But colonial officials cannot reasonably be blamed for the arbitrariness of the lines they drew. All boundaries are artificial: there is no such thing as a "natural" nation, which has journeyed through history with its boundaries and ethnic composition intact. In a region as heterogeneous as Southeast Asia, any boundary is sure to be arbitrary. On balance, Burma's best hopes for peace lie in maintaining intact the larger and more inclusive entity that history, albeit absent-mindedly, bequeathed to its population almost half a century ago.

Aung San Suu Kyi is the one figure in Burma who has popular support, both among ethnic Burmans and among many minorities, to start a process of national reconciliation. But even Suu Kyi would find it difficult to alter the historical borders. In the event of a total military withdrawal, it is possible that some insurgent groups would attempt to reclaim the territories they once controlled. A rekindling of the insurgencies would almost certainly lead to a rapid erosion of Suu Kyi's popular support. Suu Kyi is aware that she cannot govern effectively without the support of the Army, and she has been at pains to build bridges with middle-ranking officers as well as with the rank and file, repeatedly stressing her heritage as the daughter of the Army's founder.

Somewhere in the unruffled reaches of her serenity, Suu Kyi has probably prepared herself for the ordeal that lies ahead: the possibility that she, an apostle of non-violence, may yet find herself constrained to wage war.

I SPENT a lot of time with Sonny. He was very good company: always witty, ready to laugh, enormously intelligent, and so devoid of macho posturing that it was easy to forget he was a hardened combatant. When we were in the mountains, he would go striding along at the head of a column, looking every inch the guerrilla, with his dangling cheroot and his cradled M-16. When he came down to visit Mae Hong Son, he would exchange his fatigues for jeans and a T-shirt, and it was hard to tell him apart from a holidaying business executive.

I asked him once, "As someone of Indian descent, do you ever feel out of place as the commander of a regiment of Burmese students?"

"You don't understand," he said. "I don't think of myself as Indian. I hated being Indian. As a child, everywhere I went people would point to me and say *kala* ('foreigner'), although I had never left Burma in my whole life. I hated that word. I wanted to show them: that is not what I am; I am not a *kala*. This is why I am here now."

Sonny had grown up in a tiny provincial town, Loikaw, the capital of Burma's erstwhile Karenni province. While he was attending the university in Rangoon (he studied physics there for four years), Sonny championed the cause of Karenni and other minority students. With the start of the democracy movement, in 1988, he returned home and helped to organize peaceful demonstrations in Loikaw. He was arrested on September 18th and released ten days later. Fearing rearrest, he immediately planned his escape to the border.

On the night of October 6th, Sonny left Loikaw with a group of activists. They made their way to a rebel base, where Karenni insurgents gave them a warm welcome and provided them with land and supplies so that they could set up bases of their own. Sonny and his fellow-activists had never held a gun.

After eight years of fighting, Sonny has no illusions about the "armed struggle." "We're fighting because there is no other way to get SLORC to talk," he told me. "For us, armed struggle is just a strategy. We are not militants here: we can see how bad war is."

I asked, "Have you ever thought of trying other political strategies?"

"Of course," he said. "Do you think I like to get up in the morning and think of killing? Killing someone from my own country, who is forced to fight by dictators? I would like to try other things—politics, lobbying. But the students chose me to command this regiment. I can't just leave them."

Sonny has paid a price for his decision to leave Loikaw. His girlfriend, a Burmese in Rangoon, gave up waiting for him and married someone else. In 1994, his mother died of a heart attack; Sonny found out months afterward from a passing trader. She was, he said, the person he was closest to.

The student dissidents are now in their late twenties or early thirties. They had once aspired to become technicians and engineers, doctors and pharmacists. Those hopes are gone. They have no income to speak of, and their contacts with Thai society are few.

The truth is that they now have very limited options. Legally, they are not allowed either to work or to study in Thailand; to seek asylum abroad as refugees, they would have to enter a holding camp in southern Thailand while their papers were processed. Those whose applications were rejected would risk being deported to Burma, and once there they would almost certainly be imprisoned, or worse. The alternative is to join the underworld of illegal foreign workers in Thailand, vanishing into a nightmarish half-life of crime, drugs, and prostitution. They have been pushed into a situation where the jungle is the sanest choice available.

For the insurgents, Aung San Suu Kyi offers the only remaining hope of returning to their country with dignity and reclaiming their lives. When Sonny heard that I had met Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon, he wanted to know exactly what she had said. I played him some of my tape, including a segment in which she answered a question about her commitment to nonviolence.

"I do not think violence will really get us what we want," she said. "Some of the younger people disagree. In 1988, a lot of them went across the border because they said the only way you can topple this government is by force of arms. And not just the younger people. Even very mature, seasoned people have said to me, 'You can't do it without arms. This government is the type that understands only violence.' But my argument is: All right, supposing that all those who wanted democracy decided that the only way was through force of arms and we all took up arms. Would we not be setting a precedent for more violence in the future? Would we not be endorsing the view that those who have the superior might of arms are those who will rule the country? That is something that I cannot support. But we have always said that we will never, never disown those who have decided to take up arms, because we understand how they feel. I tried to dissuade some of the young people who fled across the border, but who am I to force them to stay? If I could guarantee their liberty and their safety, if I could say to them, 'You will not be arrested, you will not be tortured,' I would. But, since I could not, I did not even think I had the moral right to stop them leaving."

When the tape was finished, I asked Sonny what he would do if he was pushed out of Thailand as well. "What if the Thais decide to cut off your supplies or starve you out of Thailand?"

"It wouldn't be easy to starve us out," Sonny said. "We've been here a long time; we now have many connections with the people of this region; some Burmese students have married Thai villagers. We can survive in the jungle: we are used to it now. That is why our camps are self-sufficient. We could disappear into the jungle for a long time; we are not unprepared."

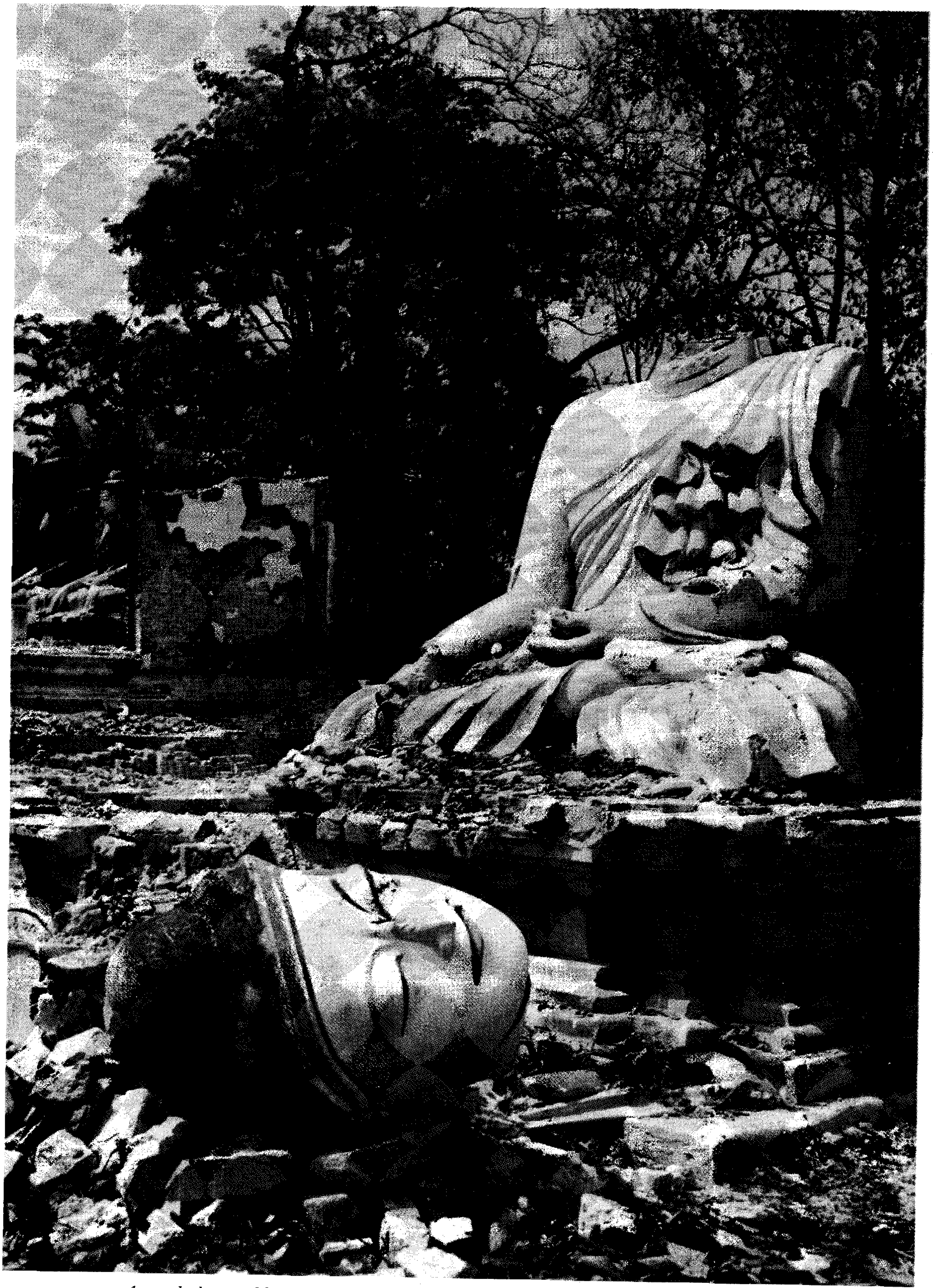
If it came to the worst, Sonny was saying that he and his men would disappear into the jungle to carry on their war from behind the lines. And it made sense: the poppy fields of the Golden Triangle, with their warring drug lords, were just a short walk away. Someone as resourceful as Sonny could disappear there indefinitely if he were pushed: the jungle was all too ready to claim him.

It was cold in the camp that night, with a bitter wind blowing through the slatted bamboo walls. I spent much of the night awake, trying to think of what it meant to live in a circumstance in which the jungle seemed to be the best of all available options.

I awoke next morning to find a pile of books by my head. Sonny had wrapped a few books in a towel as a makeshift pillow, and the bundle had come undone at night. The books were language primers, workbooks, and the like, except for one: a hardbound 1991 edition entitled "The Transformation of War." The author, Martin van Creveld, I discovered later, is something of an oracle among doomsday theorists.

I flipped the book open, and I became riveted. I began to make notes in my diary. "Van Creveld is arguing that the State's historic monopoly of violence ended with the 'Thirty Years War of 1914-45'; that nuclear weapons have rendered war, as waged by states, nearly obsolete, because inconceivable; that the world will now be dominated by low-intensity conflict; that states in the conventional sense will give way to bands of warlords; that the distinction between government, army and the people will begin to fall apart as never before, especially in the Third World; that groups such as private mercenary bands, commanded by warlords and even commercial agencies (like the old East India Company), will once again take over the

JACK BIRNS/LIFE MAGAZINE



A temple destroyed by Baptist Karens in the civil war. Insurgents are still fighting the regime.

function of war-making; that 'existing distinctions between war and crime will break down.' "

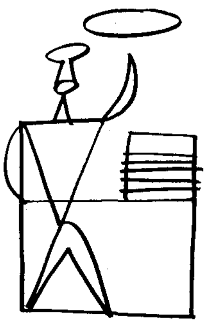
Outside the hut, Sonny and his men were busy in the crisp sunlight, tending their patches of cauliflower and mustard. Until then, I had looked upon Sonny as an anachronistic remnant of a dwindling series of "dirty little Asian wars." I now saw that I was very likely wrong: what Sonny represented was not the past but a possible future.

Suddenly, the question of Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's future assumed an urgent, global dimension: legitimate, consensual government is the one bulwark between us and the prospect of encroaching warlordism and ever-increasing conflict; in embodying that possibility, Aung San Suu Kyi represents much more than the aspirations of Burma's people.

DAUGHTER OF DESTINY?

I returned to Burma during the last week of July. In the past couple of months, there had been a number of disquieting developments. I wanted to see for myself what the consequences were—for both Aung San Suu Kyi and the country.

Last May, a conference called by Suu Kyi to mark the anniversary of her party's victory in the 1990 election was disrupted when the government arrested more than two hundred and thirty party delegates who planned to attend; many were arrested at their homes or on their way to Rangoon.



Suu Kyi, unable to convene all the delegates, held the conference anyway, as scheduled, between May 26th and May 28th. Thousands gathered outside her gates, one of the largest crowds since her house arrest ended last year. On the last day, she announced that her party would draft a new constitution—a democratic alternative to the one that was being slowly deliberated by the government. Like the party conference itself, the call for a new constitution was a provocative gesture, and for Aung San Suu Kyi an unusually confrontational one. For the first time since her release, Suu Kyi had wrested the initiative away from the government, pushing it onto the defensive. Her party was reinvigorated.

Two weeks later, the government responded. It issued a decree that effectively banned Suu Kyi's gateside meetings: all speeches and any statements that were seen to undermine "the stability of the State" were prohibited. In case there was any doubt about its objective, the law also prohibited the drafting of a new constitution without the authorization of the state. The decree was issued on June 7th, but it was not immediately put into effect. The government appears to have been unprepared for the vehemence of the international criticism that its actions provoked.

The criticism had been mounting since April, when, as part of an effort to harass and intimidate Suu Kyi's supporters, the authorities had arrested one of her close family friends, Leo Nichols, for operating an unauthorized fax machine. Nichols, an Anglo-Burmese businessman who had served as honorary consul for the Scandinavian countries, was sentenced to three years in prison on May 17th. Five weeks later, he died while in police custody, and the government's account of his death was unsatisfactory. Protests widened. Denmark called for economic sanctions, and asked the European Union to impose them; in the United States, a similar motion was debated in Congress.

The government's reaction was seen at the time to be oddly contradictory. There was even the suggestion that it might be ready to compromise. The likelihood is that the generals were largely indifferent to the international outcry; their concern was that the outcry might influence the leaders attending the July meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), in Jakarta. Burma was still not a member of the association—a legacy of its years of isolation—and membership was essential to establishing the country as a full trading partner in the region. Burma was seeking observer status, the first step in gaining membership. The talk among the Asian nations was now of "constructive engagement"—the soft diplomacy that only successful trade makes possible. On July 20th, Burma got the recognition it sought. The regime, it seems, was set on buying its own legitimacy.

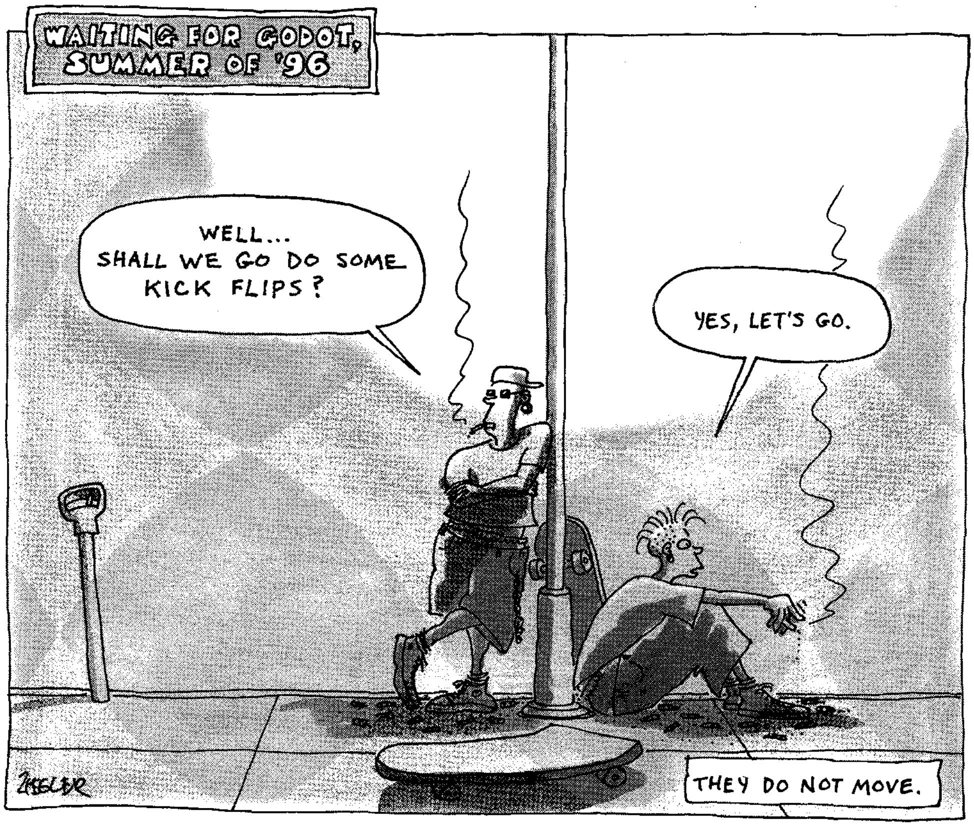
I arrived in Rangoon on Sunday, July 28th, just in time to make it to the gateside meeting on University Avenue. The week before, the American Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, had been in Jakarta and had censured the government of Burma, but his censure was largely rhetorical and ineffective. He stopped short of sanctions, and I wondered what Suu Kyi's response would be. In the past, she had characteristically hesitated to call for any kind of economic boycott; she had now changed her position. The new wave of foreign investment, she had concluded, merely "put more money in the pockets of the privileged élite. Sanctions," she said, "would not hurt the ordinary people of Burma."

The meeting was a large one—about six thousand people. Looking around, I spotted the familiar faces of several people, some of them occupying the same spots as before, like restaurant regulars. Suu Kyi was, as before at the Sunday meetings, flanked by two senior colleagues from the National League for Democracy.

On my previous visit, I had been astonished by her performance. She was full of merriment, giggling and flirtatious. Several months later, she was still animated, but the lightheartedness was no longer there.

She had changed. So, too, had the city. The next day, I went downtown, into the main business district, and found that an entire block had been transformed. The graceful but shabby old colonial arcades—untouched, like so much of Rangoon, for decades—had been torn down, and, in a matter of months, had been replaced with a maze of office buildings, hotels, and shops. In a nearby marketplace, I discovered that the value of the currency had dropped by a third, and that the price of foodstuffs had risen dramatically.

I was taken to one of Rangoon's new coffee bars by Ma Thanegi, a friend from my last visit. Ma Thanegi is an artist. She joined the democracy movement in 1988 and became an extremely active member: she even worked as an assistant to Aung San Suu Kyi and was a close friend. But then Ma Thanegi was ar-


WAITING FOR GODOT, SUMMER OF '96
WELL... SHALL WE GO DO SOME KICK FLIPS?
YES, LET'S GO.
THEY DO NOT MOVE.

rested and was imprisoned for three years. By the time of her release, she had had enough of politics—she wanted to look after her own interests—and she opened an art gallery with an American expatriate.

Ma Thanegi was concerned about recent developments, especially Western trade sanctions. Ma Thanegi's view was that a trade boycott would work only if it were a total boycott, involving all countries. And was that realistic? If only Western companies pulled out, there would be many Asian ones prepared to take their place. These new companies, Ma Thanegi said, would have less regard for Burmese workers and the local environment than those they had replaced.

Ma Thanegi had lived her whole life in Rangoon. She came of age during General Ne Win's Burmese Way to Socialism. "We lived under self-imposed isolation for decades," she said. "There was absolutely nothing, no opportunities at all, but we struggled on. Ma Ma," as she refers to Suu Kyi, "says we have to tighten our belts and think about politics. But there are no more notches to tighten on our belts."

Ma Thanegi wasn't a member of an especially privileged élite—she was middle class. She wasn't a selfish international trader, eager to devour Burma's natural resources. She wasn't looking for a quick and easy return. Ma Thanegi was tired of coping with scarcity.

I SAW Aung San Suu Kyi the next day. As I walked through the familiar blue gates, I noticed a striking new addition: a large bamboo-and-thatch pavilion. It had been built to house the delegates of the party conference; most of those who had originally been invited did not get to see it.

When Aung San Suu Kyi appeared, I congratulated her on the success of the conference. With a self-deprecating smile, she described it as "routine party work." The achievement, she said, was in SLORC's reaction: it showed "how nervous SLORC was of the democracy movement."

Suu Kyi's face seemed strained and tired. It was now more than a year since she'd been freed from house arrest, and I found myself wondering whether her freedom was not in its way as much a burden as a release. It seemed as though the impossibly difficult task of conducting a political life under the conditions imposed on her by SLORC had proved just as hard as the enforced solitude of the preceding years. Those conditions seemed to be making her into a different kind of political figure.

She was quick to confirm the change. After she was released, she said, she made a point of being conciliatory, "but SLORC did not respond. And we have to carry on with our work. We are not going to sit and wait for SLORC to decide what we want to do. . . . That's not the way politics works."

Suu Kyi had not, as far I knew, responded publicly to the recent ASEAN meeting, in which Burma was granted its new observer status, and I was eager to know what her thoughts might be. I asked her if she was surprised by the warmth of Burma's welcome.

Suu Kyi dismissed my question. It was only normal that the association should welcome a new member.

Her reply surprised me.

No, she said, really. There was nothing unusual about it.

I persisted. At a time when many nations were talking about taking actions against Burma, the Southeast Asian leaders spoke about a policy of constructive engagement, which seemed like an endorsement of the regime.

Again, I was dismissed. Picking her words carefully, she said, "I don't quite understand why one talks about constructive engagement as being such a problem. Each government has its own policy, and we accept that this is the policy of the ASEAN nations. I sometimes think that this problem is made out to be much bigger than it really is. . . . Just because [these governments] have decided on a policy of constructive engagement, there is no need for us to think of them as our enemies. I do not think it's a case of us and them."

I was witnessing, I realized, Suu Kyi the tactician. She was choosing her words with such care because she wanted to insure that she did not alienate the leaders of nations who might otherwise think of her as a threat.

I was struck by the differences in Suu Kyi's manner. That other time, I had had several glimpses of her earlier selves—the writer and researcher, the scholar trying to reach for the right words to articulate subtle gradations of truth. She now seemed much more the politician, opaque and often abrupt in her answers. The change was inevitable, perhaps, and possibly necessary, but I still found myself mourning it.

Suu Kyi now had a party line. "We think," she said, "that sanctions are the right thing. Further investment in Burma is not helping the people." It is, she said, serving only a privileged élite. "It is increasingly obvious that investments made now in Burma only help to make SLORC richer and richer. And that is an obstacle to democratization."

I mentioned some of the arguments I had heard—that sanctions will lead only to the Western companies being replaced by their Asian counterparts—and this remark, too, was peremptorily dismissed. Without Western investment, she said, "I think you will find that the confidence in the Burmese economy will diminish. It is not going to encourage the Asians to come rushing in. On the contrary."

At my previous meeting with Suu Kyi, I'd asked her whether she was contemplating a call for mass civil disobedience. She had remarked that she couldn't tell me even if she had been, but she'd gone on to add, on a note of barely disguised frustration, that if the people wanted democracy, then they were going to have to do something to get it. When I asked her about civil disobedience this time, my question was curtly dismissed. "We never discuss our plans in advance," she said. "You know that."

Even so, I was left wondering. That morning, I had talked to a diplomat who was certain that if Suu Kyi called for civil disobedience the country would follow. It would grind to a complete standstill, he said. I asked myself if that might be the future.

I left Rangoon the next day, feeling discouraged. The business-class section of the plane was full to capacity, its seats occupied by trim men in suits. They all looked as if they had flown in from the great boom centers of Asia. They were in town to do a deal. I looked down on the receding city, and I thought of a comment that Suu Kyi had made at the end of our meeting. "I've always told you," she said, "that we will win . . . that we will establish a democracy in Burma, and I stand by that. But as to when, I cannot predict. I've always said that to you."

Once the plane had sliced through the dark blanket of Rangoon's monsoon sky, the cabin filled with the whine of laptops logging on—that familiar buzzing sound, not unlike that of mosquitoes, feasting in mid-flight. ♦

EASEL BY
PATRICK D. MILBOURN

REALLY BAD SEX

THE mystery of a great artistic movement isn't what comes out of it—once you call yourself a Cubist, you're not going to surprise many people with your next work—but how it came to be. At what precise instant do a bunch of people wearing berets realize that they're not people wearing berets, but existentialists? These moments are rare things to witness, the very heartbeats of history, and it is possible we are poised before one: here, at the end of our century, an American literary movement is in the making. Its manifesto? Really bad sex.

It is an unfortunate banner. Being an intellectual proponent of really bad sex doesn't quite have the gravitas of, say, being a deconstructionist (nor is there an easy aesthetic-sounding name for its practitioners; "fuckups," for instance, doesn't seem quite right). Even so, there's no getting around it: our time is going to be remembered for what it doesn't do well. Sex, of course, has been a feature of our century, but it's usually dramatic stuff, the sex you'd never tell your mother about. What's being written now—whew! You don't really want to tell anyone about it.

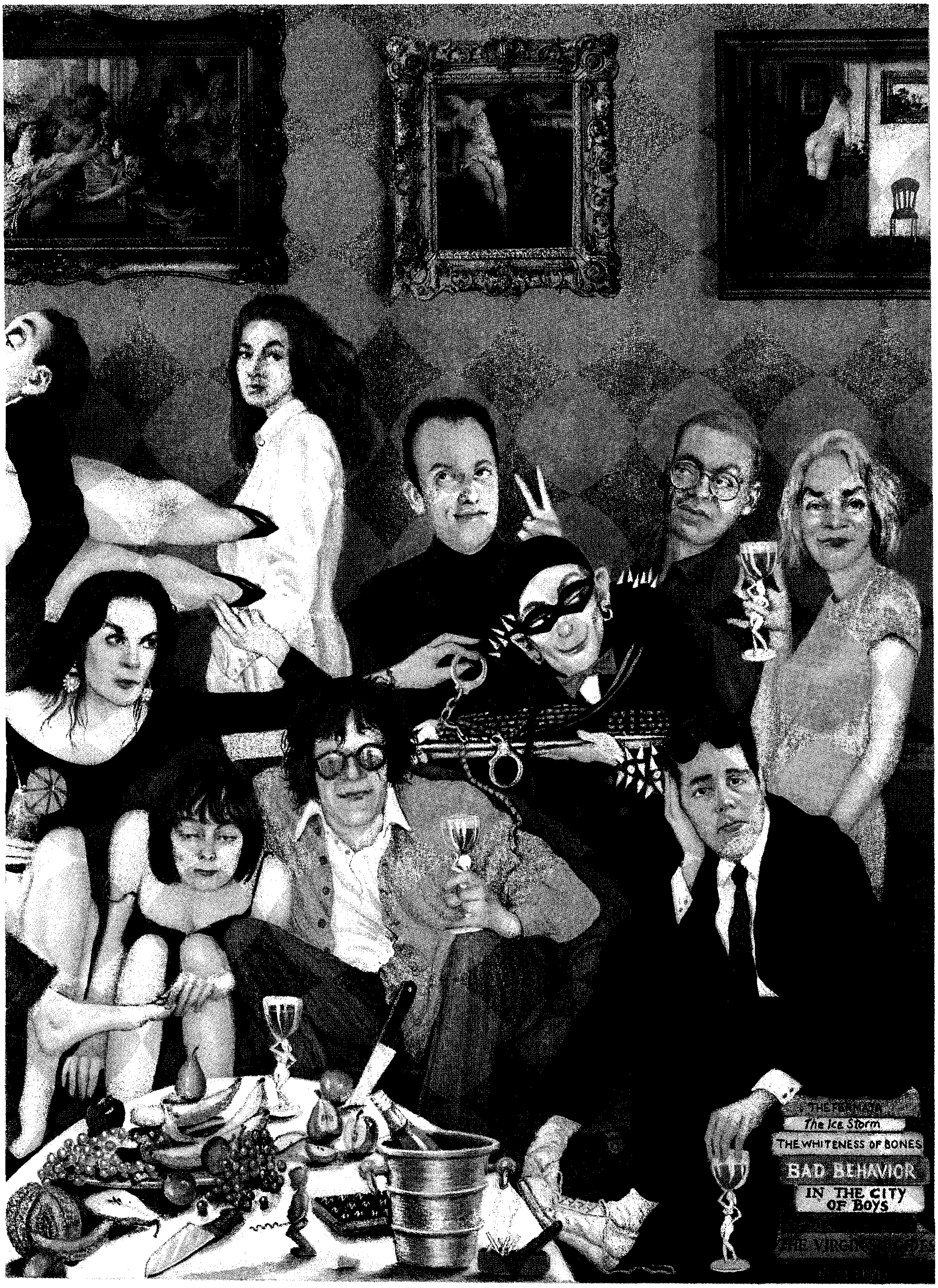
Do we want to read about erections that don't quite . . . erect, or else erect so quickly that they make a mess over everything? Is this art? And what about moments of oral intimacy so exciting that one partner falls asleep halfway through?

History will probably prove that it all started four years ago, with Nicholson Baker's "Vox" (euphemistically described as an exercise in telephone sex), a book that seems to have revealed to a generation of writers—clinical, unromantic, armed with extraordinary technical vocabularies—a rich new subject: dysfunctional sex, sex that doesn't make babies, and that doesn't usually work. In fact, sex that's a pretty miserable thing to be doing.

What does this tell us about our times?

—BILL BUFORD

Pictured at right (clockwise from the top): Matthew Klam, unidentified man with inflatable doll, A. M. Homes, Jeffrey Eugenides, Junot Díaz, Alice Adams, Bret Easton Ellis, Rick Moody, Mary Gaitskill, Susanna Moore, and Nicholson Baker.


THE FERMATA
The Ice Storm
THE WHITENESS OF BONES
BAD BEHAVIOR
IN THE CITY OF BOYS
THE VIRGIN

PERSONAL HISTORY

THE GIRLS OF CAMP LENORE

At Mrs. Spectorsky's summer camp, a love of the arts made all things possible.

BY DIANA TRILLING

"AND what do you do in the arts, Mr. Trilling?" Mrs. Spectorsky greeted Lionel in her splendid contralto.

Lionel had often heard me speak of the directress—I was twenty-three and, after all, the many summers I had spent at her camp in the Berkshires, whether as camper or counsellor, constituted a considerable portion of my youthful experience of life. Now that we were about to be married I had at last brought him to meet her.

No doubt Lionel was about to reply that he was a graduate student at Columbia, working for his Ph.D., when I broke in recklessly, "He's an Apache dancer, Mrs. Spectorsky. He throws me around all day—that's why I'm so thin."

I had never before teased the directress and I was startled by my temerity. As I saw Mrs. Spectorsky glancing uneasily from Lionel's face to mine, I began to laugh in order to indicate that what I had said was only a joke. The directress visibly relaxed. In her long years of association with the young, she had learned to accommodate their strange humors.

The fact that Mrs. Spectorsky greeted Lionel with so prompt a reference to the arts was scarcely a surprise to me, and even Lionel had to have been prepared for it: describing Camp Lenore to him, I must surely have made plain to him the special role of art at Mrs. Spectorsky's institution and the important difference that this represented between Mrs. Spectorsky's venture and the other girls' camps which in these early years of the century were beginning to dot the Adirondacks and the Berkshires. Although Lenore, like other such enterprises, had its required quota of athletic activities—swimming and canoeing, baseball, basketball, tennis, track—unlike its competitors it was not merely a place to which parents sent their young daughters during their school vacations so that they might live healthily outdoors and be instructed in sports. Mrs. Spectorsky's camp was a place of spiritual aspiration and dedication before it was a place for the development of our physical competences. It was an aesthetic rather than an athletic camp. Indeed, it was at Lenore that, at the age of thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, my pores open to whatever might come to me either by chance or by adult design, I first discovered this new and wider dimension of life, the dimension of art, a range of emotion and perception that had previously not been accessible to me.

Our camp day began at Lenore with morning Assembly, and regularly the directress took advantage of this gathering of her young charges to remind us of what it was that distinguished us from other summer camps for girls and in what way we were the beneficiaries of this difference. It was not that the body was neglected at Mrs. Spectorsky's camp. "*Mens sana in corpore sano*—a healthy mind in a healthy body," the directress translated with even emphasis. Not only did we have a superior kitchen at Camp Lenore, presided over by the directress's niece, a trained nutritionist. We also had a full corps of athletic instructors, including a special riding counsellor for those of us whose parents afforded us this addition to an already complete athletic program. But mind was in command, and mind, for Mrs. Spectorsky, was a state of grace most readily attained to by love of the arts.

Art had not been without its place in my childhood home. My parents had a music box with a wide assortment of tinkling musical disks. We also had a Victrola with records by Caruso and Kubelík and Fritz Kreisler, and a piano. From an early age, all three of us children had music lessons from Professor Steinmetz, the one-man musical conservatory who performed his feats of instruction in our Westchester community. And we had books. From a door-to-door salesman my father had bought a library that substantially filled a six-shelf glass-fronted bookcase with the works of Mark Twain, Balzac, George Eliot, Molière, Dumas, and Victor Hugo, all of them in rich leather bindings stamped in gold. Unhappily, my intimacy with this parade of immortal talent was much limited by the fact that we children were not allowed to approach the costly volumes without first washing our hands, and that each time I removed a book from its shelf I was freshly cautioned against dog-earing it or injuring its spine by laying it face down on a table.

Art was not put at this forbidding distance from us at Camp Lenore; at Mrs. Spectorsky's camp it made the very fabric of our lives. We were a hundred and forty campers and between thirty and forty counsellors. And at least half of our counsellors were chosen for their skill in dance or drama or the crafts. In addition, Mrs. Spectorsky engaged a trio of musicians—a pianist, a violinist, and a cellist—to perform for us each afternoon. The pianist was the hardest worked of the three. She had not only to play for us during Music Hour each afternoon but also to accompany our many dance classes and to assist as needed in the preparation of our pageants and musical revues. In good weather, dance classes at Lenore were held on the softly rolling lawn in front of the Lodge, the rambling stone cottage in which Mrs. Spectorsky had her office and living quarters. In bad weather, they met in the Assembly Hall.

It was at these afternoon concerts provided for us by Mrs. Spectorsky's trio, all of them aspirants to professional careers, that there was confirmed in me what was undoubtedly a native love of music; it was sufficiently strong to have withstood even the teachings of Professor Steinmetz. The concerts took place at five each afternoon

"I very much wanted to achieve transcendence": Diana Trilling at Lenore in 1918.

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

"He's old money, but, unfortunately, minus the money."

in the camp Assembly Hall and they were entirely devoted to classical music: Brahms and Tchaikovsky, Schubert, Dvořák, Fauré. The Assembly Hall was a bare wooden structure with movable benches and a slight elevation at one end, which we used as a stage. When the hall was used for morning assemblies or for indoor theatricals, the benches would be set up in row after backless row, the front rows reserved for our smallest campers, the Bluebirds, as they were called, with behind them the Intermediates, then the Seniors and the P.C.s, the latter the handful of older girls, Privileged Campers, who were in line to become junior counsellors. I had myself started at Lenore at the age of thirteen, one of its younger Seniors. On the outside of the Assembly Hall, facing the distant line of Berkshire hills, ran a narrow veranda. Music Hour was not compulsory, but I never failed to attend. The weather permitting, I listened outdoors, sitting on the veranda floor with my back against the rough shingles. As I sat gazing toward the surrounding hills, the music would drift out to me and my heart would swell with longing. From my earliest years, longing was always my secret companion.

Mrs. Spectorsky had ruled against ballet at Lenore. She said it was against nature to bind our poor little feet in tight silk slippers and to try to raise ourselves on our toes. At Lenore we danced in Grecian tunics, barefoot and bare-legged, in the manner of Isadora Duncan. Was it not the superb Duncan herself who had recorded the horror with which she had observed the bleeding feet of Pavlova, the famed Russian ballerina, after but a few hours of practice or performance? No art could be art, said the directress, if it entailed suffering. Art was joy and love, art was transcendence.

I was the readiest of Mrs. Spectorsky's youthful adherents and I very much wanted to achieve transcendence, but I was too self-conscious to dance. I had come to Lenore with the sad knowledge that, aspiring though I might be in mind, I was sorely lacking in physical grace, and to this dispiriting self-assessment had been added the appraisal of my bunkmates. Their judgment was final. My legs were too thin and my knees too bumpy to merit careless exposure. I must find other means of participating in the pageants that were so notable a feature of our dramatic program.

Like our dance classes, our pageants took place on the lawn in front of the Lodge. They were a composite of narrative and dance. Sometimes the drama counsellor, more often Mrs. Spectorsky herself, acted as narrator. Majestic, classical, the directress would stand on the steps of the Lodge and with vibrant voice call upon the ancient religious mysteries to reënact themselves.

"With fruits and flowers we deck thy altars," Mrs. Spectorsky's wonderful contralto rang out to the surrounding hills, while to the accompaniment of this and other similarly broad-metered sentiments a dozen barefoot little dancers, virgin priestesses in the Temple of Aphrodite, disported themselves on the wide green lawn in front of the Lodge. They bore baskets of crêpe-paper offerings that had been fashioned for them during the previous week in our arts-and-crafts classes. One summer—it must have been during my second or third season at Lenore—I was given a special part to play in one of our outdoor spectacles. I was made to arrive at the steps of the Lodge on horseback. Puccini's Girl of the Golden West had come to the rescue of the maidens of Greece.

Mrs. Spectorsky seldom sang for us, but I loved her voice, even in speech. As a young woman in Paris, she had studied with the great operatic tenor Jean de Reszke. It was seldom discussed but we older campers plainly understood that it was the directress's marriage that had defeated her operatic ambitions, or perhaps not the marriage in itself but her choice of Mr. Spectorsky as her husband.

"Spec!" Addressing Mr. Spectorsky, the directress's usually modulated voice became hard and biting. It was plain that Mrs. Spectorsky had little love or regard for her husband; he was not a respected partner in the management of Lenore. Lenore was Mrs. Spectorsky's lone venture. The life of the camp flowed from her alone. He was a striking-looking man, tall, thin, straight-backed, with very black hair that had begun to gray and a short pointed beard that was also graying. His eyes were disconcertingly small and intense—or so they seemed to me. I knew virtually nothing of his or Mrs. Spectorsky's life before the start of Lenore. I assumed that they had been born in Russia and had met as students in Paris.

At Lenore, in addition to pageants, we put on one-act plays—I remember the whimsical "Six Who Pass While the Lentils Boil"—and musical revues, especially evenings of Russian folk dances and songs. I had a clear and appealing soprano voice, and when there was solo singing to be done I would be called upon to perform. For our Russian evenings, I was cos-turned and made up like a Russian nesting doll. "*Spi malyutka, moy prekrasny . . .*" In phonetic Russian taught me by Davy, one of our arts-and-crafts counsellors, I sang the lullaby of an unknown country—it was as if the River Volga lapped at my feet. The Volga was a familiar river to us at Lenore, far more so than the Mississippi or even the Hudson.

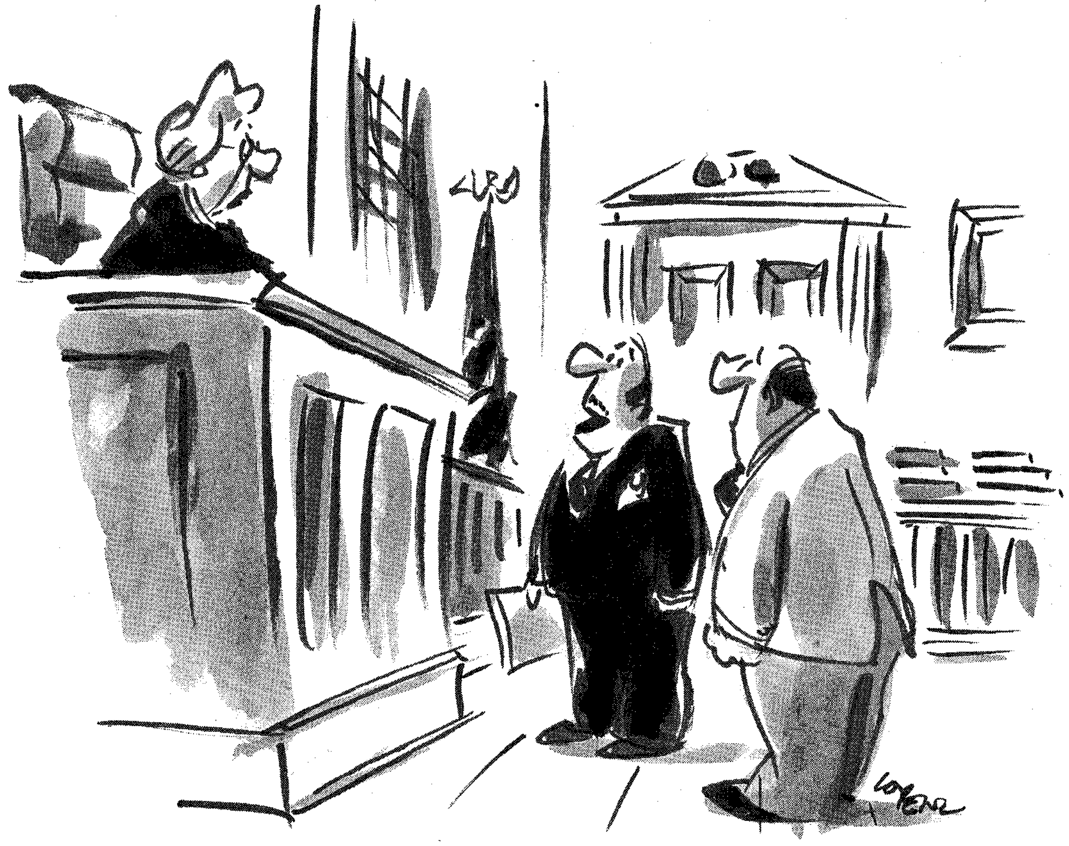
Through many summers, Mrs. Horn (I invent her name as I do several others which I no longer reliably remember) was in charge of our camp dramatics. She was both of our camp staff and independent of it. While not only the campers but all our other counsellors lived in groups of four in "bunks"—little wooden cabins with canvas flaps instead of walls and windows—Mrs. Horn lived alone at a small distance past the Senior campus, at the edge of the woods that separated us from the lake. She had been a Shakespearean actress and was a cherished friend of Mrs. Spectorsky. If there had ever been a Mr. Horn, he was well out of mind. Although she was technically a member of the staff, she shared none of its duties: she had no campers in her charge, nor did she eat like the rest of us in the Mess Hall. She had but one responsibility: to assist us with our pageants and other dramatic presentations. When she narrated a pageant or was otherwise onstage, she stood with her head slightly thrown back and with her left hand cupping her left breast.

As far as I could make out, Mrs. Horn never ate. But I sometimes saw her, swift and lithe, carrying a large jug of milk from the kitchen to her cabin. Did milk alone sustain her impressive energies? I never saw her at the Senior washhouse, where we older girls had our washbasins and toilets. The camp had another washroom, too, at the rear of the Lodge, where Auntie Ella, the camp disciplinarian, was in command, but I never saw Mrs. Horn at that washhouse, either. In private, she no doubt took her bar of soap to the lake, as we girls did. I once caught a glimpse of her alone at the lake. I saw her dive from the high diving board, birdlike, effortless. It awed me that anyone of her age—how old *was* she? forty? fifty?—could dive as Mrs. Horn did.

We older girls were fascinated by Mrs. Horn, but none of us had crushes on her as we had crushes on Hermit or Red or Billy. But if Mrs. Horn was out of the reach of our fantasies we weren't out of the reach of hers. I was a Senior, probably fifteen, when she asked me to come and live with her, not at camp but wherever it was that she lived when she was not at Lenore. She promised to make me into a great Shakespearean actress. I scarcely heeded what she was saying—my response to her invitation was to giggle. Fifteen was then, of course, a young age. Still, within a year I would enter college. How long could one continue to meet the confusions of life with a giggle?

THERE were few opportunities to raise our artistic consciousness which the directress left unexplored. One summer, she invited Robert Frost to speak to us at Lenore. The poet was staying in Pittsfield, only a dozen or so miles from Camp Lenore. His daughter ran a bookmobile in the surrounding countryside, and from it I purchased the first book I ever bought for myself, a volume of the poems of Rudyard Kipling. Though not yet the eminence that he would become, Frost was already a poet of repute. Yet it was actually not as a literary man but as a man of nature that Mrs. Spectorsky invited him to speak to us. A slithering green snake had been seen near one of the Intermediate bunks, and Lenore was on the brink of panic. The visit from the local woodsman was intended to assure us that our snakes would do us no harm. For his visit, Sunday Assembly was delayed until midmorning and held outdoors on the front lawn. I no longer recall how Frost dealt with our snake problem. I remember only what seemed to me to be his great height and the shine of his thick hair as it blew in the summer wind.

Any male visitor created a stir among us. Our non-female population was limited to four: the directress's husband; the directress's son, Auguste (his name must be given its French pronunciation); Dr. Saunders, husband of our camp nutritionist; and Steve, our Polish man-of-all-work. There are times now, looking back over my years at Lenore, when it seems to me that we were horrid to Auguste Spectorsky, though there are other times when I am struck by how unexpectedly thoughtful we were of him; we tried to



"Meaning no disrespect, Your Honor, but fifty years to life is beyond my client's comfort level."

spare him some of the embarrassment he must have felt as the only boy in a camp of a hundred and forty girls.

The whole of Auguste's name was Auguste Comte Spectorsky; he had been named for the French positivist philosopher. Auguste, too, like Mrs. Horn, had a bunk of his own, but his was situated at the other end of the camp from hers, not far from the camp's front gate. I have no idea what Auguste did throughout our long camp days. He had no friends and he shared in none of our activities. I have no memory of ever seeing him at an assembly or at our camp dramatic offerings. Where did he hide himself? To be the only boy in a camp of a hundred and forty girls: it is a test such as a child Turandot might have devised for her young suitors! How did Auguste survive it? He did survive it, to become a well-known book reviewer. Later, he worked at *Playboy* and—so I heard—became an habitué of Hugh Hefner's erotic Eden. One day when we were fully grown, Auguste and I ran into each other in a Manhattan bookstore. I, too, had become a book reviewer. At sight of me, he fled as from a ghost of the past.

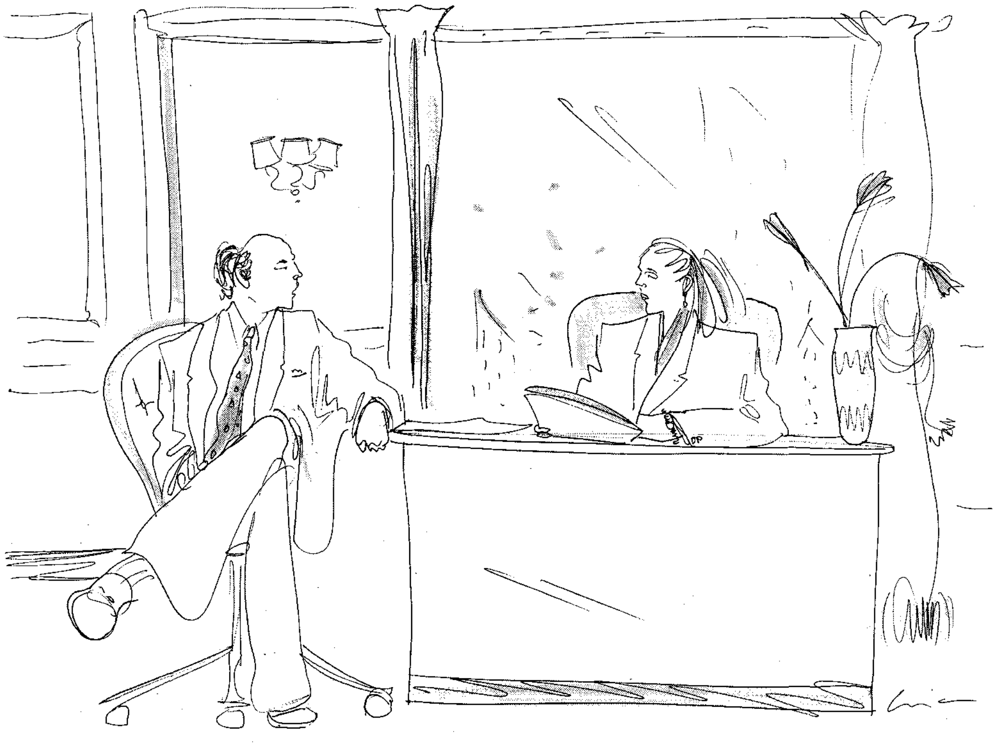
Auguste was not the only child of the Spectorskys: he had an older sister, Miriam. But Miriam's presence didn't, like his, require explanation. Except that, at least as an adolescent, she had a troubling tendency to faint, she was in all respects her mother's spiritual heiress, and in due course she in fact became her mother's official adjutant. When, many years later, I would return to camp for a quick, anxious visit, there she would be. It was Rest Hour, a time for the picking up of loose threads, and, gentle but urgent, she was having an improving little talk with an errant Intermediate.

Sometimes, on summer evenings when the temperature had abruptly fallen, we would have a campfire night. On the Intermediate campus, near the tennis courts, Steve would make a giant pile of wooden crates and boxes that he had hoarded for just this purpose, and when it became sufficiently dark he would set the pile ablaze to our excited applause. In the roaring light of the fire, we huddled together in our thick camp sweaters, our rough Army blankets spread beneath us. These were the nights when Mr. Spectorsky came as far into his own as was ever allowed him. He stood in the light of the great fire and told us the tale of the Ring of the Nibelung. An ardent Wagnerian, he was bent on making little Wagnerians of us all. He brought us into the mythic company of Siegmund and Sieglinde, Siegfried, the Valkyrie, Brünnhilde and her fond Wotan. Year in and year out, I heard and forgot the saga of the Nibelung. With their glittering metal helmets and shields, their wildly rearing horses and sacred swords (those improbable chastity belts of theirs), Wagner's bold heroes and heroines are a muddle to me still.

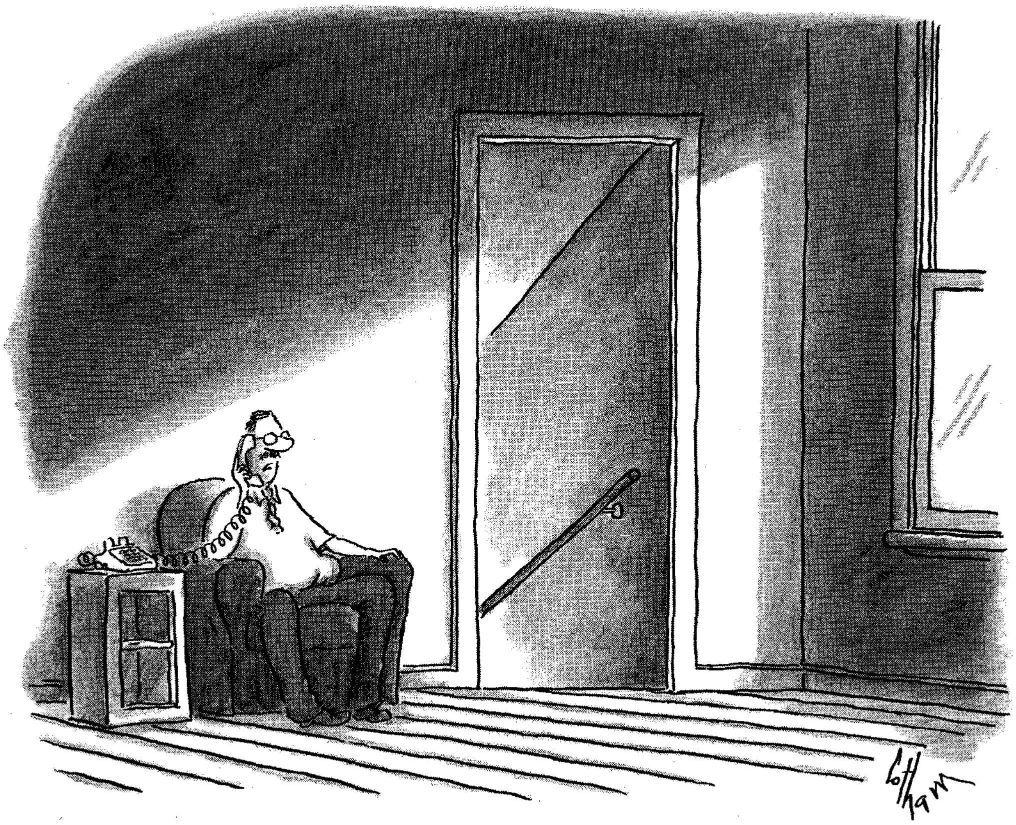
It was frequent on parent weekends for a father to bring a gift of lollypops for the camp—dozens of them. If he was sufficiently imaginative, they would be of one flavor, so as not to cause a problem in their distribution. Mrs. Spectorsky set these gifts aside to be distributed at campfire. We cheered the absent donor. "Rah, rah, rah, Mr. Shapiro!" we roared in unison, led by our Senior cheerleader. Mr. Shapiro was Fritzi Shapiro's father, and at moments such as these I dearly wished that it were my father who was being celebrated. Sucking our lollypops, we older girls folded ourselves as closely as we could into our sweaters, and in the now blazing, now dying firelight tried to still our nameless yearnings. There was no one to tell us what it was that our young bodies, edging toward each other, longed for as we sat under the wide dark sky in the changing light of the fire, or where it was in the longings of our bodies that art might really have its source.

The words "Jew" and "Jewish" were never heard at Lenore. We were nevertheless a Jewish camp. Mr. and Mrs. Spectorsky were Jewish, and a hundred and thirty-nine of our hundred and forty girls were of the same faith and drawn from the newly successful business class of New York. Apart from our counsellors, most of whom were not Jewish, the single Gentile among us was Nancy Still, a blond wisp of a girl with a roguish grin that belied her simplicity. Nancy came from Staten Island, and I never found out—not that I tried—what accounted for her presence among us.

Nancy ranked high in popularity at Lenore. But she lacked subtlety, a quality that was much cherished by the older campers and much sought in our counsellors. The quality was hard to define, but its chief component was mystery. For a counsellor to be subtle, she had to possess some obscure characteristic of personality which at the same time defied and seduced us. Expectably enough, our nonathletic counsellors were more likely to meet this requirement than our counsellors in baseball or



"Could you get back to me in about two vodka tonics?"



"I'm upstairs right now. On weekends and holidays, I go downstairs."

• •

basketball, although there were exceptions, like Hermit, our head swimming counsellor, or Billy, who was camp bugler and also taught baseball and track. Hermit, for example, was set apart from most of our sports counsellors by her splendid good looks and her spare use of words. It was important if you were to be thought subtle not to let yourself be too easily drawn into careless conversation. Many of us had crushes on Hermit. I was myself in love with her for a whole summer.

While no note was taken of conventional religion at Lenore, the directress was far from a nonbeliever or lacking in religious sentiment. Scornful of sects and denominations, she had her own sacraments and was indubitably to be counted among the devout. Her immediate leanings were toward the religious teachings of the East, but in total she was a worshipper at the shrine of the immaterial. She aspired to the whole wide glorious universe of spirit.

If ever the directress's capacity for rising above the impositions of worldliness was tried, it was on parent weekends. Each summer, there were two weekends on which parents were permitted, even urged, to visit their children. For the few hours in which they were in possession, Lenore trembled under the intrusion of this alien culture. The mothers and fathers arrived at Lenore like an invasive horde in their shiny new Packards and Pierce-Arrows, the fathers wearing plaid golf knickers and broad-patterned Argyle socks, the mothers brilliant in their expensive summer outfits. Not even Mrs. Spectorsky's poise and cultivated speech could threaten the confidence of these noisy invaders—having paid for their children's summer tuition, the parents apparently felt that they had bought, if only for these few hours, the right to its lawns and lake, its Assembly and Mess Halls.

At Monday morning Assembly after a parent weekend, the directress would quietly address the daughters of the rich and noisy on how the voice and the heart were one: a hundred and forty girls were once more instructed in the difference between striving and aspiration, this ill-marked crossroads at which the directress took up her pedagogic post. Gravely, she explained to us that, while there was much that was laudable in being a good swimmer or tennis player, at Lenore the goal was a willing rather than a winning. Better to play the game poorly or run the race in which we suffered defeat than not to extend ourselves, not to try. Within each of us, she summed up, was an inner gleam that must guide us.

We might not easily unravel Mrs. Spectorsky's pedagogic syntax but we had no difficulty in comprehending the high intention she had for us. Unfortunately, the brave vault of mind to which she inspired us often had painful physical consequences. On ten-mile hikes I bore my aching legs and blistering heels in silence. No, not in silence. I burst into energetic song. Its vigor propelled us in our forward march!

Each season, small groups of Seniors would be taken on an overnight hike to the summit of nearby Mt. Greylock. Here were tests of another sort. We were driven to the base of Greylock by Steve in the camp truck; with two counsellors in charge, we climbed the short rest of the way. Supper was sandwiches and fruit, which we carried with us, along with our cumbersome bedrolls; by the time we had finished our picnic, it was dark, but we pressed together, resisting sleep. We were frightened by the darkness under this vast expanse of sky, and we filled the air with our forced gaiety. Our counsellors had difficulty in at last quieting us for sleep. A poncho and two Army blankets beneath us, two blankets and another poncho on top of us, we lay on the ground in pairs; from bed to makeshift bed, we went on calling to each other. Long after it might have been supposed that we were all of us asleep, I lay awake; I was shivering and I hunched down in my blankets as best I could. I felt alone and lost.

For all the directress's tireless teaching—"Girls, be kind to one another"—kindness was often in short supply among us, especially among the older girls. How cruelly we teased the girl in the next Senior bunk because, unlike the rest of us, she had not yet begun to menstruate! During one of my own menstrual periods, Mimi Pomeroy, who was the camp's fat girl and my enemy, said to me, threateningly, "I'll kick you and a pound will flow!" Without comprehending what the threat could mean, I was much troubled by its menace. Even now it disturbs me to recall it.

I knew little about my body. I complained one day to the camp nurse about a persistent pain in my side, and Dr. Saunders was sent to my bunk to examine me. "You've strained an ovary," he said. "Probably from diving."

I must have looked at him blankly. "Don't you know what an ovary is?" he demanded gruffly. I shook my head.

"How old are you?" he inquired.

"Fourteen," I admitted.

"My God!" The doctor summarized the situation, and stomped angrily from the bunk.

We were presumably not a competitive camp, but at the start of each summer we divided into two teams, the Greens and the Whites, and the two teams battled for supremacy throughout the season. One could score points by one's excellence in a sport. But there were other means of winning points for one's team. I earned points for my team, the Whites, by writing our camp songs, borrowing their tunes from music that was familiar to us. To the popular tune of "Avalon," I wrote one of my major point-winners:

The Whites are just like Chesterfields;
They satisfy.
And like Ward's bread, they are Tip Top;
On us rely.
Like razors, Ever-Ready.

My memory of the current advertising slogans that I incorporated into this lyric deserts me here, but I remember another song of mine, my lollypop song, set to the immortal tune of "Harrigan":

L-O-double-L-Y
P-O-P spells lollypop.
It's a special kind of candy;
The man who made it was a dandy.
L-O-double-L-Y-P-O-P, you see.
It's a lick on a stick
And it's guaranteed to make you sick.
Lollypops for me!

I had yet another means of contributing to the final score of the Whites. It was not for naught that I bore the name of the goddess of the hunt: I excelled at archery. When I became a counsellor, this was the sport I taught. Actually, I was teaching it at Lenore while I was still a camper. As Mrs. Spectorsky would have wished, I made archery into an art. Marksmanship? This was of but minor importance. I put my emphasis on form: the arm of the archer had precisely to line up with her unhunched shoulder; her head must be held high, the neck upstretched and proud; there must be uplift, aspiration in every line of our young bodies. Sometimes at the end of the class, I lay on the ground and braced my bow between upraised feet. I shot arrows into the air. It was a brave and wasteful pastime.

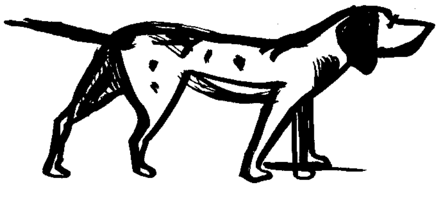
ONE summer, a group of us at camp formed a clandestine society, the A.E.G.T.H. The letters stood for "Auntie Ella Go to Hell." With no small astonishment, I now recognize that when this sinister organization came into being we, its creators, were fifteen years old; in another year—as I have indicated—I would be entering college. We already had a secret society at Lenore, Rada Thron, which had been created by Mrs. Spectorsky. The presence of the A.E.G.T.H. was not announced until it was in action; that is, until we marched on the Mess Hall. To the music of Chopin's "Funeral March" I composed an appropriate dirge for our demonstrations:

We—are—the girls—of—the—A.E.G.T.H.
Ours—is—a meeting—of ghostly
or—i—gin.

I insert the dashes to indicate the solemn pace at which we walked and sang.

Our camp disciplinarian, Auntie Ella, was a wiry little woman of middle age with sharp, darting eyes and unnaturally black hair, which she wore in thick loops over her ears. Her responsibilities at Lenore were many, her energies formidable. It was Auntie Ella's duty to see that our bunks were thoroughly swept out each morning and our beds freshly made. A ruthless perfectionist, she was not above pulling back the smoothest of top blankets to reveal the crumpled bedsheet that it was intended to hide. She was in charge of the collection of our laundry and regularly inspected the heads of the younger campers for nits or hair bugs. Of the older Intermediates and Seniors she assumed that we would report to her on our own if we suspected that our heads were unclean.

"If your head itzes," she would tell us, "go into the kitzen and get a pitzer of hot water, and I'll wass it." Dear Auntie Ella! We took her accent, as we took her inspection of our bunks, to be a form of personal attack.



I doubt that any of us in the A.E.G.T.H. had then heard of the Ku Klux Klan, but if we had its ugly message had been lost on us. For our grand march upon the Mess Hall, we wrapped ourselves, like Klan members, in our white bedsheets, covering our heads with pillowcases in which we had cut holes for our eyes. "We—are—the girls—of—the—A.E.G.T.H.," we chanted in dire unison as we entered the dining hall and took a table. Mid-meal, once more solemnly intoning our dirge, we rose and slowly lifted our table high over our heads until the dishes rattled like the bones of a skeleton.

I don't know what we supposed we were doing, and today I should like to believe that our demonstration was only an effort to josh our poor old disciplinarian. I fear, though, that this was not the case, and that we actually believed that we posed a threat to our camp monitor; that, indeed, we hoped to achieve a relaxation in our rules for neatness or for Rest Hour—and we weren't the babies of Camp Lenore, we were its Seniors, its big girls! We stood on the brink of young womanhood; in another few years, those of us who were not in college would be thinking of marriage and of having children of our own.

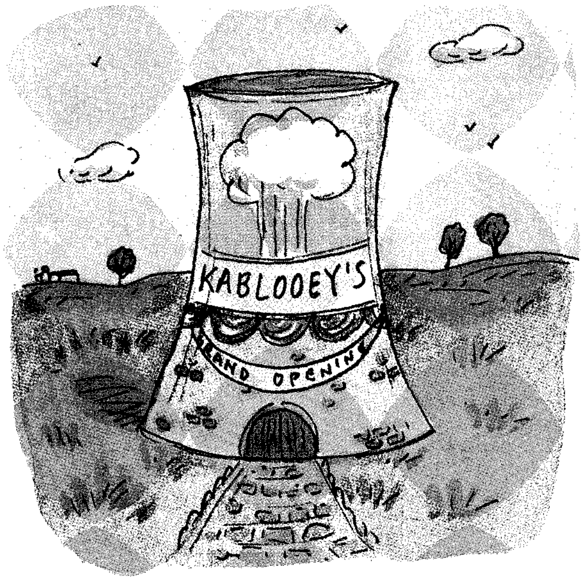
Auntie Ella was the only counsellor whom we addressed as a relation. Sometimes we addressed our counsellors formally—Miss Harrington or Miss Press—and sometimes by nicknames or by their last names alone, as in the case of Whittelsey, our riding counsellor, or our head counsellor, Beam. The directress was extraordinarily skilled in choosing her staff; they were as if designed to uphold the principles on which Lenore was founded. They were also almost universally good-looking: Red, with her tousled red curls; boy-girl Billy, with her strangely bruised lips; Jerry, the dance counsellor with whom I fell in love when I graduated from my crush on Hermit.

In general, Mrs. Spectorsky treated our crushes much as she treated the A.E.G.T.H.—she paid them no heed. She did intervene, however, in my crush on Jerry: she took me for one of her little walks and talks in which she probed the

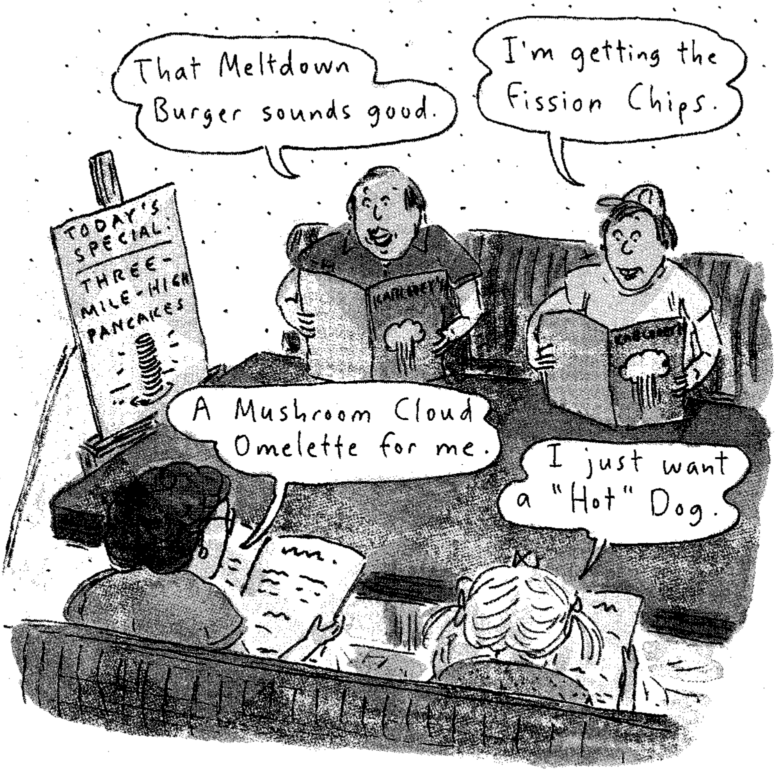
HOW TO TURN A CLOSED-DOWN NUCLEAR REACTOR INTO A THEME RESTAURANT:

A MASTER PLAN

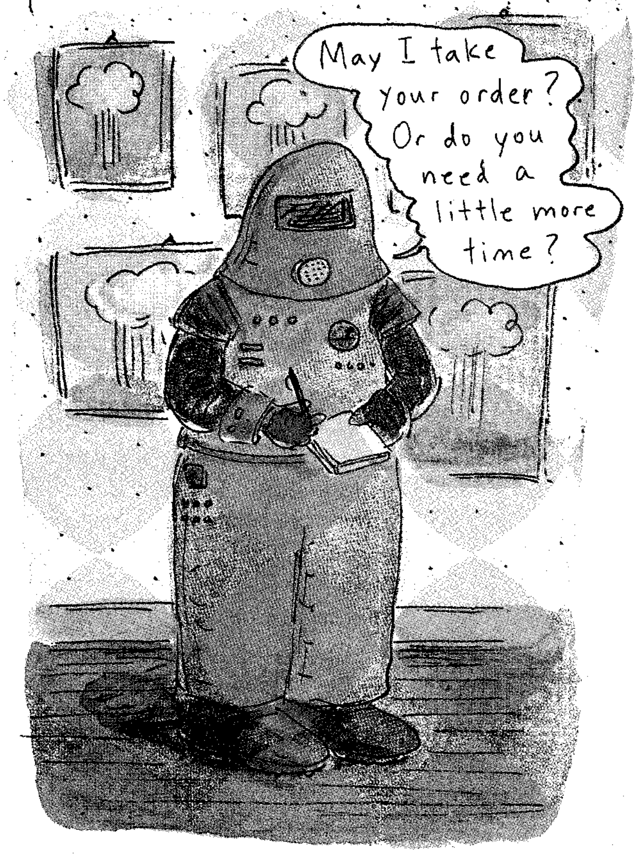
First, come up with a snappy name.


KABLOOEY'S
GRAND OPENING

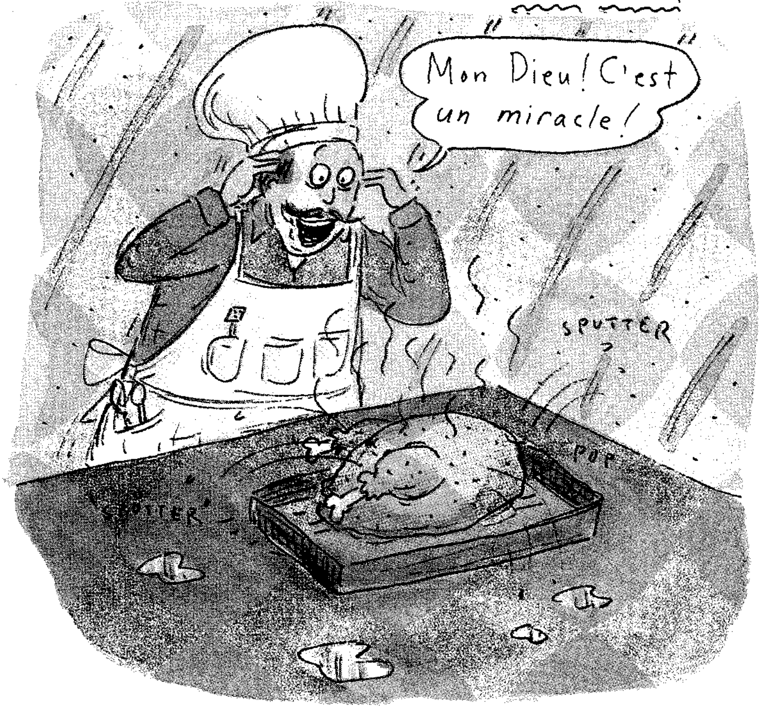
Then plan a theme menu.


That Meltdown Burger sounds good.
I'm getting the Fission Chips.
TODAY'S SPECIAL THREE-MILE-HIGH PANCAKES
KABLOOEY'S
KABLOOEY'S
A Mushroom Cloud Omelette for me.
I just want a "Hot" Dog.

Have the waiters dress in protective gear, just for fun.


May I take your order? Or do you need a little more time?

And, best of all, the food just *cooks* *itself*.


Mon Dieu! C'est un miracle!
SPUTTER
POP
SPUTTER

nature of the relationship. She was being careful not to upset me, but I understood that I was being warned against some untoward influence in my life. She left me with an unnamed fear that at moments would return to me well after Jerry had all but disappeared from memory.

We graded our counsellors by their subtlety: Jerry was subtler than Hermit, Billy was subtler still. Red was an uncommon mix of subtlety and practical good sense—when the high-school friend with whom I had planned to go to Radcliffe failed her admission examinations and urged me to go elsewhere with her, it was Red who advised me not to yield to this appeal.

And Beam, our head counsellor? How did Beam rate for subtlety? Only now, this many years later, does it occur to me to measure her on this yardstick of ours. Heaven knows, there was mystery enough about her. She kept herself well apart from the rest of the staff, far more than was demanded by her position as head counsellor. And she was as spare in speech as in body. Yet we would not have spoken of her as subtle, not in the sense in which the word was used at Lenore. Her pale good looks were without robustness. Her hair was a commonplace brown, thin and straight, and long before it was the fashion she wore it down her back, held by a wide tortoiseshell barrette. Her thin face always seemed to be tired, and although I recall her pleasant smile, I have no memory of her laughter.

And why should she have laughed, I now ask myself. Under the circumstances, it must surely have represented a miracle of self-control for her to do her job as she did and so thoroughly conceal her personal anguish. I reconstruct her story from old newspaper clippings and I realize that it was during these very months when she was at Lenore that her lover decided to end their relationship and reconcile with his wife. How much better it would have been for her if he had! According to the newspaper accounts, he did take his wife to Europe that summer on what was supposed to have been their second honeymoon. But after his return he once more sought out Beam and Beam once more joined the universe of his sick and sordid imagination.

It was in my first year as a Senior that Mrs. Spectorsky established our camp honor society, Rada Thron—I never saw the name in print and I am not sure that I spell it correctly. Because Mrs. Spectorsky always mentioned it in conjunction with our pursuit of the inner gleam, it was my belief that our camp motto, "Follow the Gleam," was what the words meant in one of the languages of India. But I now discover that Rada Thron is neither Hindi nor Sanskrit but that it vaguely suggests Tibetan, and thus may have come to Mrs. Spectorsky through the writings of the Theosophists, specifically those of Mme. Blavatsky; the conjecture is bolstered by the fact that in the early years of this century a poem by Tennyson, "Merlin and the Gleam," was excerpted in the *Theosophical Journal.* The poem exhorts us to follow our inner light to new heights of the spirit. Comte, Wagner, Theosophy—surely it was a rich and varied board at which we feasted at Lenore!

"I'm afraid your dental plan does not cover tusks."

There were no counsellors in Rada Thron, only Seniors who had been at Lenore for at least two years. The wish to belong to our camp honor society brought many girls back to Lenore for a second season or more; indeed, there was a suspicion among some of us that this commercial purpose had its part in Mrs. Spectorsky's creation of the society. At Assembly early each August, the directress announced the names of the newly elected members—they were chosen by their predecessors in the society. Even the Bluebirds recognized the importance of the occasion; they applauded excitedly and stamped their feet. I am still puzzled by how long it took for me to be elected to Rada Thron. Apparently the delay embarrassed even Mrs. Spectorsky herself: the summer before I finally became a member, she took me aside to apologize for my continuing exclusion but without accounting for it.

I was sixteen when I was at last a member of Rada Thron but was not too old to enjoy its privileges. The camp honor society had its own clubhouse: Mrs. Spectorsky had had a log cabin built in the woods at the edge of the lake for its headquarters, and here the society held its secret meetings and had its overnight parties. The cabin had a large stone fireplace, but we preferred to cook outdoors; we contrived a fireplace before our door. In a large iron cauldron that we hung from a sturdy green stick, itself resting in the forks of two other stalwart saplings, we concocted something we called a Mulligan stew. It consisted of everything the kitchen could spare: beans, onions, carrots, bones or chunks of beef,

AT THE COOKOUT

The wives of my friends
Have the air
Of having shared a secret.
Their eyes are lowered
But when we ask them
What for
They only glance at each other
And smile,
Which only increases our desire
To know . . .

Something they did
Long ago,
Heedless of the consequences,
That left
Such a lingering sweetness?

Is that the explanation
For the way
They rest their chins
In the palms of their hands,
Their eyes closed
In the summer heat?

Come tell us,
Or give us a hint.
Trace a word or just a single letter
In the wine
Spilled on the table.

No reply. Both of them
Lovey-dovey
With the waning sunlight
And the evening breeze
On their faces.

The husbands drinking
And saying nothing,
Dazed and mystified as they are
By their wives' power
To give
And take away happiness,
As if their heads
Were crawling with snakes.

—Charles Simic

tomatoes, potatoes, cabbage. As we ate, we heard the sound of taps being played at camp, but we stayed awake long into the night, putting fresh logs on our indoor fire against the mounting chill. We laughed and talked. Last thing before sleep, the girls asked me to sing, and I sang for them softly: "Nobody Knows De Trouble I've Seen," "Solveig's Song," Delilah's love song to Samson, that most womanly of love arias.

I PIECE the story together from the old newspaper accounts: It was the month after Beam had been head counsellor at Lenore, and shortly after her lover had returned from what was to have been a second honeymoon in Europe, that he began to poison his wife. The poisoning would seem to have continued throughout that fall and winter. The first report of the bizarre crime appears in the *Times* of April 27, 1924: A Westchester resident, Clarence O. Baring, has been arrested for an attempt to murder his wife. "A young woman" is involved in the Baring marital situation, but her name is not mentioned, nor are we given any clue to her identity. The story appears on a Sunday under a bold front-page headline: "ADMITS IN COURT HE GAVE ARSENIC TO HIS RICH WIFE." In smaller type there follows, "C.O. Baring of White Plains Pleads 'Guilty, Except as to Intent to Kill.' "

On Monday, April 28th, the Baring story appears again on the front page of the *Times:* "DIPHTHERIA GERMS FED TO MRS. BARING, PROSECUTOR SAYS." A smaller headline reads, "Declares Evidence Also Shows Pneumonia Microbes As Well As Arsenic. . . . Wife, Victim of Many Long Illnesses, Was Said to Have Been Obsessed by Jealousy."

Although there is another *Times* story on Tuesday, it is not until Wednesday, April 30th, that the "other woman" is identified. Her name is Mildred E. Beam, and she is a twenty-seven-year-old teacher of physical education in Elizabeth, New Jersey. She is the daughter, we learn, of a Maine sea captain who is no longer alive, and she is a graduate in physical training of Columbia's Teachers College. At the time of his arrest, on Friday, April 25th, Baring and Mildred Beam had just that afternoon returned from a five-day trip to Norfolk, Virginia.

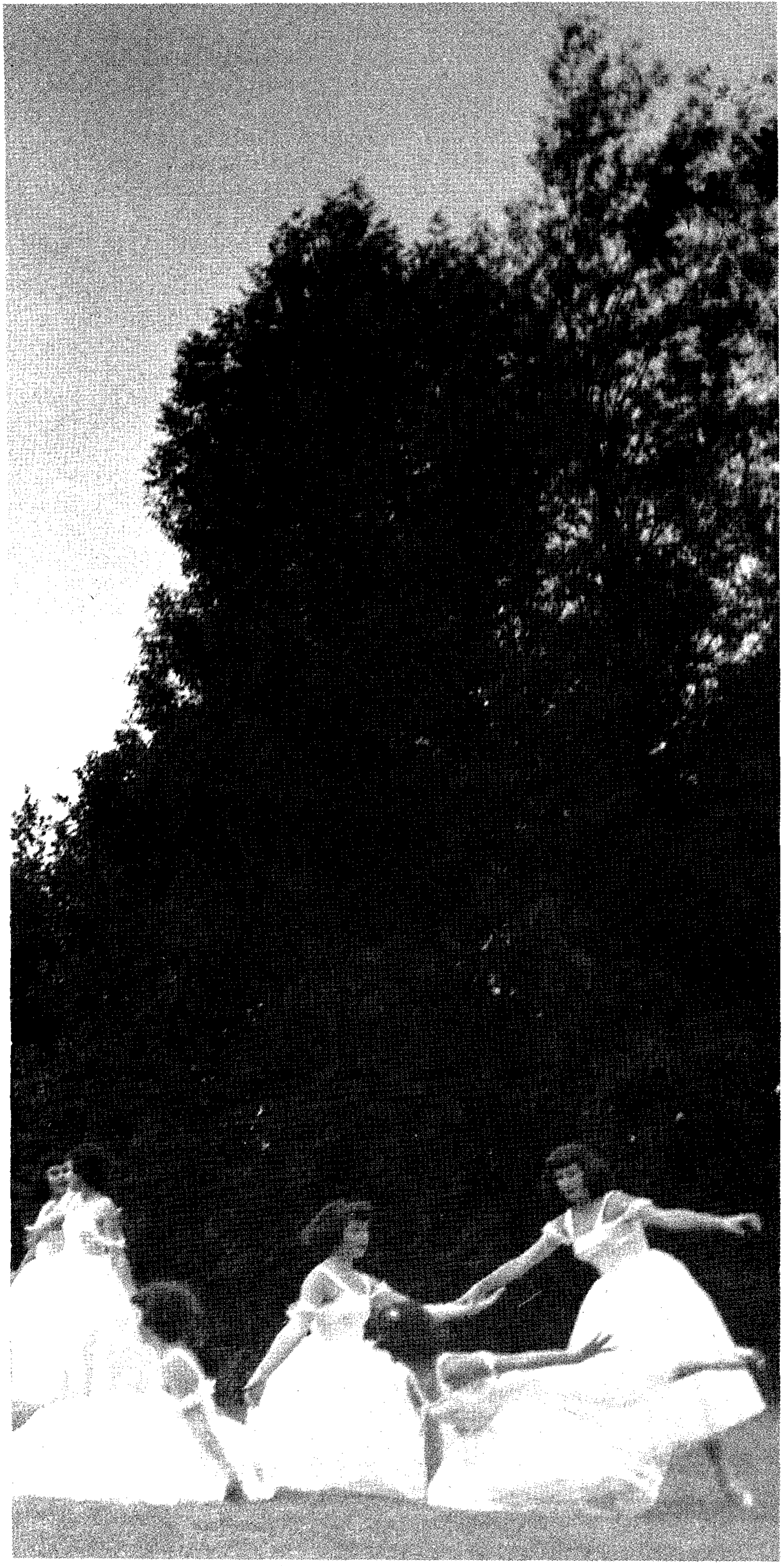
Of Clarence Baring we are told that he is a man of good reputation in his business and residential communities, successful in his work; he is the Eastern director for a manufacturer of heating equipment, forty years of age, an avid amateur chemist and inventor. He is sufficiently plausible in appearance and manner to have encountered no difficulty in obtaining germ cultures from the Willard Parker Hospital. In addition to feeding his wife arsenic, he has also given her the germs of pneumonia, diphtheria, typhoid, and scarlet fever. He introduced them into nighttime snacks of stuffed dates, malted milk, bread, and milk.

According to the *Times*, Baring's "other woman" was aware that her lover was married. He had promised to divorce his wife and marry her. He had, in fact, temporarily separated from his wife a few years earlier. But the Barings had reunited, and it was upon their reunion that Baring had decided to poison his wife. Mrs. Baring, after suffering undiagnosed illnesses, had come to suspect that her husband was trying to kill her. She began to secrete the foods he gave her and to send them to a toxicologist for analysis. Her suspicions were confirmed. She had not died of the arsenic and germs Baring had given her because the doses were too small. When he was arrested, Baring readily admitted that he had fed these poisons to his wife, but he denied any wish to kill her. In jail, he explained that he had intended only to make his wife so ill that he would have to take her to California to recuperate. This would have enabled him to break off his relations with his mistress. On further investigation, it was revealed that there had been other "other women" in Baring's life than Mildred Beam. He had kept an apartment in New York for his extramarital activities.

Mildred Beam would appear to have learned of Baring's arrest on Saturday, April 26th, the day after the two of them returned from Norfolk—she read about it in a newspaper on a train and collapsed. She took refuge with her mother and disappeared from public view. But she kept herself available to the Westchester County District Attorney.

Neither Baring's employer nor any of his friends ultimately rallied to his side; none offered to make bail for him. His story was unbelievable, and they refused to believe it. Baring never stood trial. On July 8, 1924, the *Times* proclaims, "BARING FOUND INSANE BY STATE ALIENISTS. . . . Experts Testify That Six in Family of Prisoner's Father Suffered from Mental Disease. Prisoner Had Illusions. Thought He Was Being Followed and Insisted His Wife Had a

"With fruits and flowers we deck thy altars," Mrs. Spectorsky's wonderful contralto rang out to the surrounding hills. She was



rshipper at the shrine of the immaterial. Above: Dancing at Lenore in later years.

Child." On the testimony of the psychiatrists, Baring was remanded to the Matteawan Asylum for the Criminal Insane. Here, so far as we are told, the story ends.

Soon after Baring's arrest, Beam had run away from the press, but she never ran from the law. As I read her story today, it seems to me that she had much to be grateful for in the treatment accorded her by both the press and the law—she was not hounded by reporters and photographers or written about sensationally, and the District Attorney appears to have treated her with entire respect. Her front-page scandal was made as little scandalous as possible.

NINETEEN TWENTY-FOUR was the summer that Dorothy, my dormitory neighbor and close friend at Radcliffe, came to Lenore as a counsellor. Mrs. Spectorsky was in need of another pianist, and I recommended Dorothy, who was a serious student of music. I ask Dorothy now if she remembers the Beam story and she tells me that she has no recollection of it. This confirms my own recollection that Beam's name was never mentioned at camp even though it was during the camp season that Baring was sent to Matteawan and that his and Beam's awful story was being reported in the newspapers. In the twenties, it was not required of us that, in order to qualify as good citizens, we keep abreast of public events. We had no newspapers at Lenore. We were shielded from the world rather than urged to engage in it.

The counsellors at Lenore had a day off each week. I had now become a full-fledged counsellor. There was little we could do for recreation within walking distance of the camp, and we usually spent our free days hitchhiking. Dorothy and I hitchhiked to the college campuses in our New England area: Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Amherst.

Although life was not then as hazardous as it is today, we sometimes encountered difficulty because of our venturesome means of travel. I remember one excursion, for instance, when it was already dark before we could get a lift. We found ourselves with two men who, it soon turned out, wanted more of us in friendliness than we were prepared to give. We had to cross the Mohawk Trail, where there was little traffic and virtually no illumination, and I had begun to be badly frightened when, by good fortune, a gas station loomed up ahead of us and our driver stopped for gas. There was another car at the station and simultaneously, without pause to explain our conduct, Dorothy and I jumped out and took refuge in it. The occupants were a middle-aged couple who quickly appreciated our plight. They drove many miles out of their way to deliver us at our camp gate. Several minutes had to pass before I realized that I was still clutching the Scout knife in my bloomer pocket.

As a full counsellor—and how many summers of hope and strenuous application it had taken to achieve this position!—I had two bunkloads of Intermediates in my charge; I also taught archery, helped with Intermediate basketball, and, like the rest of the athletic staff, was regularly on watch during swimming periods. In addition, I helped as I could in the preparation of our camp plays and pageants. Unfortunately, our growth isn't calibrated for us like a thermometer. I had no way of knowing whether or not I had at last reached maturity. Had I? Was I there?

Many girls came to camp with special needs. We would be made acquainted with these individual problems at the first staff meeting of the season: Edna Hartman must eat no tomatoes, Evelyn Kantor had had a mastoid operation and *must not* get water in her ears. Eleven-year-old Beatrice, a charge of mine, was clearly the most heavily burdened with physical and emotional disorders. Of Beatrice we were cautioned that she must be guarded against heat, cold, insects, ice water, acidity, and such a myriad of other perils that a wave of derisive laughter ran through the room as Mrs. Spectorsky went on with the list. Strangely, I was unable to laugh. One had perhaps to be oneself enough young, still in battle against excessive parental vigilance, to feel a quick sympathy for this child so overtended and ill-loved.

On rainy days at Lenore, when the camp lawns were suddenly transformed into shiny pools, the children would put on their bathing suits and run splashing and sliding in the downpour. It was on one such day of shrieking delight that I spied my Beatrice sitting in her bunk, a lone mute spectator at the fun. Beatrice must not be allowed to get her feet wet, Beatrice must not take a chill: I had not forgotten the instructions I had been given, but they suddenly had no bearing on the misery of this child, alone, excluded from everything that was allowed the other girls her age. Hurrying to her bunk, I told her that she must put on her bathing suit and—quick, quick, quick!—join the other girls in the rain. Heady with authority, I assured her that no harm would befall her. She had my promise that she wouldn't catch cold. When Beatrice returned to her bunk I was waiting with a towel. Her face was wreathed in her wet smile, water dripped from her hair. I rubbed her dry and hustled her into her clothes—I insisted that she wear a sweater. In the days that followed, I listened anxiously for telltale signs of illness, a cough or a sneeze. Beatrice and I were lucky: she was well. I doubt whether I have ever again been this courageous on behalf of freedom.

As a counsellor, I returned to Lenore for two more summers after that. Then Lionel and I were married, and I didn't again see Lenore or its directress until more than a decade had passed. In my mid-thirties, a settled married woman, I was driving in New England with Lionel when all at once it came to me that we were in the vicinity of my old camp. I burst out impulsively, "Let's go to Lenore!"

It was only much later, when we were driving away from camp and I was trying, not very successfully, to still my pain and anger at the scant notice that Mrs. Spectorsky had taken of me, that I realized that I had of course invited just such rejection by dropping in at Lenore this unexpectedly. Mrs. Spectorsky suffered with grace the intrusion of the parents at camp weekends; for the rest of the summer, the seclusion and routine of Lenore must not be interrupted. I was not part of this routine. I had once been part of Lenore but I no longer shared in it. Now it belonged to other girls, little girls like the Bluebirds and bigger girls as well, edging toward womanhood, making their way through the wilderness of their ignorance and their desires. I was no longer part of Mrs. Spectorsky's history as she was part of mine.

It was Rest Hour and the camp was deadly quiet. Mrs. Spectorsky was near the Mess Hall and when she caught sight of me she did no more than lift her hand in an ambiguous wave. While it could have been a wave of recognition, it was as likely a wave of dismissal. This was the full extent of the recognition I earned from her, and even this little was more than the response I earned from her surrogate, her daughter. A short distance away, Miriam stood talking to a little camper. She was bent over the child, gentle and attentive. In the sympathetic lines of her body, she was a replica of her mother's concern.

I had left Lionel in our parked car and I had proceeded alone to the Lodge. I moved through a silent universe. Obedient to whoever was today's Auntie Ella, the campers at Rest Hour were quiet in their bunks, resting on their beds, perhaps writing home to their families. In a flash of sweet memory, there had come back to me the recollection of the summer when Mrs. Spectorsky had employed the Rest Hour to read aloud to the girls in my bunk from H. G. Wells's new bestseller, "The Outline of History." We had been the most ordinary-minded of adolescents yet we had realized that we were being improved and, uncomprehending as we might be, this had flattered us.

Apart from the soft sounds of summer, I could hear only the distant whirring of a lawnmower. Was it still Steve, I wondered, who had the care of the camp lawns, and had he now been provided with a power mower? How proud this would make him!

I had rapped on the door of Mrs. Spectorsky's office in the Lodge and it had been opened to me by Mr. Spectorsky. For a moment he had stood vacantly staring.

"Hello, Mr. Spectorsky," I murmured. I was finding it difficult to speak clearly. "Don't you remember me?" I asked.

The directress's husband didn't ask me to identify myself. He drew me into the room and to the window where he lifted my chin and turned my face to the light. He was still tall and straight-limbed, though he now moved a bit heavily. Chiefly one saw his age in his blurred eyes. They had lost their old glitter. At last, he said, "It's my little Diana." He folded me in his arms.

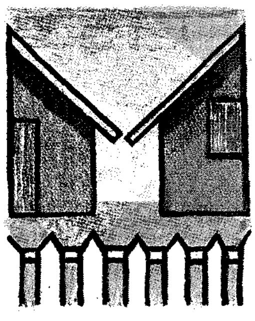
So here we have it, and here, I suppose, it should be left, with me in the embrace of "Spec," who had meant so little to me that I couldn't even remember the stories he had so often told us at campfire—how poorly I must have listened! My thoughts must have been elsewhere. But where? Where do our thoughts go when we are growing up and suppose that we have no further use for them? ♦

FICTION

THE WRETCHED SEVENTIES

A decade of darkness recollected in tranquillity.

BY BARRY HANNAH



MANY, too many, days, Ned Maxy had stared out a window weeping, fasting, and praying, in his way. In character of both the drunkard and the penitent, he had watched life across the street. Now, in a healthier time, arising to his work at early hours, he labored at his front-window table, peering out on occasion at a world that spoke back to him. Not loudly and not a lot, but some.

Over the white board fence he'd just painted, and through the leaping wide leaves of his muscadine arbor, he spied shyly like a stranger in town. The satisfaction of this almost frightened him.

The woman in a uniform who left every morning at a quarter to eight was a paramedic. In the awful seventies Maxy had sworn to hundreds in saloons that he wanted most of all to be a paramedic. This was a bogus piety to support his drinking. But here was the real thing. Maxy did not know the paramedic woman but he watched her through a pair of opera glasses he had bought at a Hot Springs pawnshop from a man who had also been broken in the seventies and who now sat with his crutches beside him and lit up unfiltered Luckies that made him retch.

In his late forties the lifetime monster of lust had released him, first time since he was eleven, just as the monster of drink had released him four years ago. He still did not know precisely what accounted for it, but it was a deep lucky thing, now that he was able to see the woman paramedic across the street leaving for work and comprehend that she could be happy without him. He looked on in high admiration, good will, and with no panic. She was engaged to a wide man with a crewcut who came out with her to the doorway on his big white legs, in Bermuda shorts, and embraced her, seeing his love off in the cool of the morning. Maxy applauded their love. He had been in love this way twice in his life. He recalled the stupid rapture and had no advice for them at all.

He had spoken to the woman only once, told her she looked good in her uniform—all ready to fly away in a helicopter in her high-top black leather sneakers. She had the voice of a country girl, the kind of girl who had soothed his old man dying in the hospital at age eighty-seven. The old fellow had got rich in the city but loved the country much better, and the nurse was a sweet comfort at the last. Maxy liked that this country girl had the moxie to fly in a machine that would have terrified many hillbillies, and he told her so. Even from a hundred yards he could see her go shy, having an unexpected compliment sail out to her from a man who didn't need anything, here in the late cool of a summer morning, her head of blond hair lowered to look at her own eminent bosom of which he was no longer required to dream in impossible lechery.

She answered some way he couldn't make out, in a whisper, a country whisper of thanks, good beyond form. This whole exchange would not have been possible even three months ago, when in his mind he would have been teaching her the needs of his famished world, her body a naked whirlwind of willing orifices, as he smiled at her all the while like the prince of liars.

The whisper had fetched back for him his old mighty friend Drum, lately a suicide. Drum was a practicing Christian, one of maybe four selfless men Ned Maxy had known in life, brought low by pain and anxiety after a heart attack. He was cut off from good work and high spirits and could not go on, they said. Drum was the only whispering drunkard Maxy knew. Through all the thundering seventies he had never raised his voice.

He killed himself in the bathroom of a double-wide mobile home he rented from a preacher who lamented to the police: Now poor Drum can't ever go to Heaven. But he had been tidy, there in the bathtub with the large-calibre pistol, much appreciated.

His drinking buddy Drum's whispers of encouragement, his pleading to Maxy that he was a man who must respect himself, that he must work hard, that he must not waste the precious days or the gifts poured on him by nature—Ned Maxy would take that whisper with him until his own heart stopped, too, and he knew this.

The whisper of the paramedic country girl was there for him now. He did not want to make too much out of it. Thousands must have been given this gift. He didn't want to be only another kind of fool, a sort of Peeping Tom of charity.

But he was a new fool. Some big quiet thing had fallen down and locked into place, like a whisper of some weight. Ned Maxy had been granted contact with paradise, and he could hardly believe the lack of noise. His awful seventies decade had gone past twenty years. Finally it was over.

The next day, Maxy, in a daze, got his rushed suit out of the cleaners and attended the wedding of the woman paramedic at a country church down between Water Valley and Coffeeville. He shook hands with the bride and groom, then stood out of the pounding heat under the shade of a tall brothering sycamore.

Nobody ever figured out quite who he was. Their faces were full of baffled felicity, as if each one was whispering, Well, howdy, stranger, I guess. ♦

FILIP PAGOWSKI

BOOKS

YOU HAVE TO LAUGH

A new biography takes on Charlie Chaplin.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

THE job of World's Most Popular Entertainer is not one that seems to lead to a modest estimation of one's powers and a limited sense of self-worth. Elvis, a decade into his tenure, announced that he had seen Christ and Antichrist battling in the clouds above Graceland; John Lennon, six years into owning one-fourth of the title, was writing ballads about his imminent crucifixion; and Michael Jackson, keeping up the messianic ambitions, felt compelled to invent not just a new race but a whole new gender, of which he could be the only member.

That Charles Chaplin, who got this strange job first and held it longest, never went much beyond planning to cast himself in a movie about the life of Napoleon is, in a way, a tribute to his underlying sense of reality. (He had the stills made for the Napoleon picture; he looks good in the uniform.) Reading Joyce Milton's new biography of Chaplin, though, which bears the title of "Tramp" (HarperCollins; $32), you wouldn't know that there was much of anything peculiar or out of the ordinary about Chaplin's career. To the familiar biographer's sin of underestimating the type to which her subject belongs, and attributing the habits of a whole class to the traumas of a warped individual, she adds the more original sin of completely missing what in Chaplin's career was so peculiar that it's a miracle he managed to emerge even as a normal mixed-up, egocentric artist.

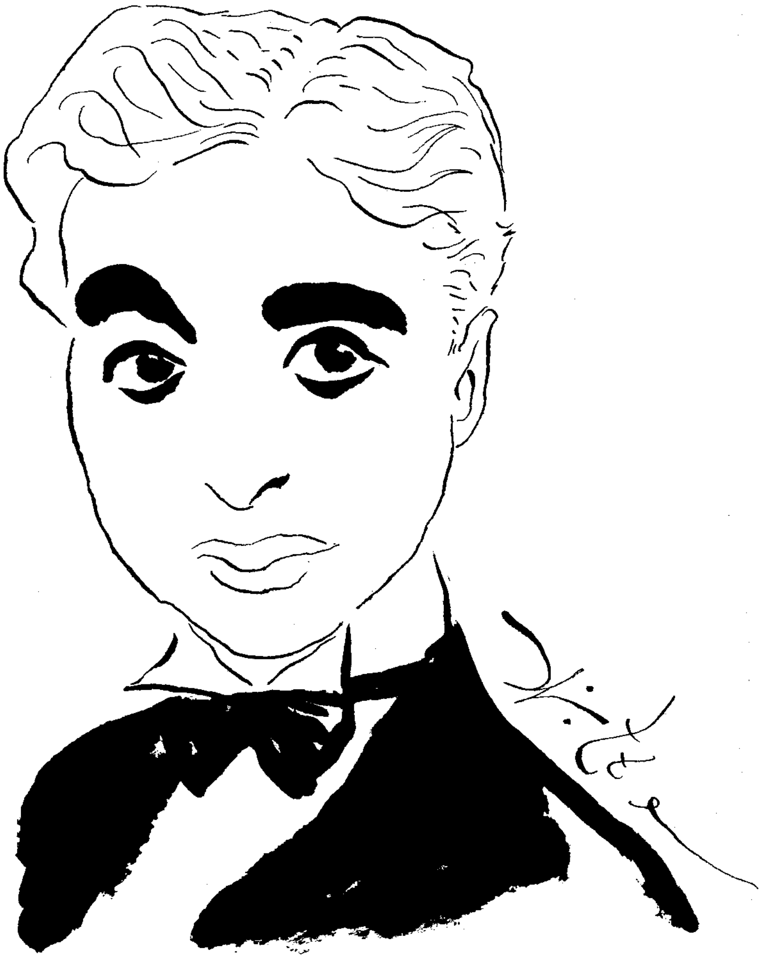
EVERYBODY calls Chaplin's childhood in London, in the eighteen-nineties, "Dickensian," meaning rough-and-tumble, but, as Chaplin's own wonderful account of his early years, in "My Autobiography," reveals, it was Dickensian in a much more specific sense. Like Dickens, who was sent out from his happy family for three scarring months at the blacking warehouse, Chaplin experienced deprivation as a series of traumas, not as a steady grind. He was a brilliant and hypersensitive little boy, who adored his mother, Hannah. ("Mother was a soubrette on the variety stage, a mignonne in her late twenties, with fair complexion, violet blue eyes and long light brown hair that she could sit upon," Chaplin recalled as an old man, and there is the voice of a little boy in love.) Even after her stage career faded, she somehow managed to keep up an air of eccentric gentility for her two sons, Charlie and Sydney. (Their father, a music-hall star, flitted in and out of their lives, depending on the state of his bank account and on his alcohol level.)

Chaplin's memories of his mother's cooking and storytelling and sewing and playacting—her performing for one person, the little boy alone—are the obvious sources of the powerful images of pleasure and intimacy and just-us-twoness which haunt his movies. But she was intermittently crazy, and when she was the boys did time in an orphanage and a workhouse. Then one day, when Charlie was twelve, he found her in the garret, stark mad, and had to lead her by the hand to the infirmary for the insane. She never recovered. The family was thrown on the mercies of late-Victorian charity: the mother ended up in a public lunatic asylum. (It is typical of Milton's insensitivity to her subject's experience that when Chaplin, fifty years afterward, makes a passionate, if slightly scattered, defense of the British National Health Service, she puts it down to mere political posturing.)

With Chaplin, as with Dickens, the horrible fall was all the more horrible because it lasted a relatively short time: you got a glimpse of the abyss without learning that you could make a life there if you had to. Chaplin experienced poverty as pain; he took it personally. This made it hurt, even though the worst was over quickly. Soon after his mother's breakdown, he became a child star, triumphing in the role of Billy, the leader of the Baker Street Irregulars, in William Gillette's production of "Sherlock Holmes." Chaplin's entire life breaks into three simple parts: enchanted childhood, childhood nightmare, stardom.

So his profession saved him young, and it may be that the key to understanding Chaplin is to remember what that profession was, and what an enveloping world it created. Milton makes very heavy weather of the notion that Chaplin's Gypsy grandmother may have exposed him to a secret Gypsy life, turning him into a kind of Romany Marrano—an idea that would have been pie to the grownup Chaplin, so it's hard to believe he would have kept it secret for a moment. But Chaplin did belong to a tribe, and one just as strange as that of the Gypsies, with laws and habits of its own. It was the tribe of the British music-hall performer, of the lower reaches of the legitimate stage. His parents never had him baptized; they just put a notice in a theatrical paper. Performing wasn't just what he did; it was all he knew—and the kind of performing he knew, which lay on the very edge of polite entertainment, always had to make sure it would be seen as Art. Almost everything about the grown-up Chaplin—the oscillations between petty miserliness and public generosity, the "intellectual" enthusiasms, the love of a tone of vague moral uplift (his mother sang patriotic songs), even the swell dressing—was part of the manners of the only life he had known. It was a deep and old culture: read the Crummles chapters in "Nicholas Nickleby," about a nineteenth-century British theatrical family, and you will know all you need to know about Chaplin's psychology—and even his left-wing politics. (Had the Infant Phenomenon of the Crummles family grown up and gone to Hollywood, she, too, would eventually have been lying by the pool at Lillian Hellman's enlisting people to support the Loyalists in Spain.) If you actually *read* the incoherent pro-Russia speeches Chaplin made in the forties, which got him into such trouble, you can see that he might just as well have been singing patriotic songs about the Boer War. Getting worked up about foreign wars was one of the things that a good performer did, like owning a hundred suits and a country estate. Even Chaplin's pomposities were commonplaces of the culture. The world of British music hall, revue, and pantomime was a working-class one with an aristocratic ethic—the place where you could pass from low to high without doing time in the purgatory of the middle class. So the people it produced, if it got them early enough, were more blue-blooded than the blue bloods. (Noël Coward is another example.)

If Chaplin's personality was fairly standard theatrical stuff, his genius wasn't. He was always a star. When he arrived in America, in 1910, he was already, at twenty-one, the leading comedian in Fred Karno's troupe, at the top of the music-hall ladder. Within weeks of joining Mack Sennett's Keystone Film Company, in California, in 1914, he appeared as the character we call the Tramp in an improvised six-minute short, tacked on to the head of a documentary about olive oil. A year later, his face was the most famous in the world, known from Tokyo to New York to Paris, and he was about to become a millionaire many times over.



Chaplin: What happens when a romantic stumbles into clowning?

MICHAEL WITTE

This mad ascent has happened enough times since to make it seem normal, but it had never happened before. Why Chaplin? Like most of his other biographers, Milton emphasizes the split between Chaplin the "innocent" onscreen funnyman and Chaplin the offscreen Lothario. But if you look at his films in order from 1914 to 1918 what strikes you—even before the limitless, acrobatic energy of his performances, or his Mozartean gifts as a mime—is how uncannily beautiful a young man he is, and what sexual presence he has onscreen. The large, liquid eyes, the cherubic curls, the violinist's hands, the quick gentle gestures, and, above all, the sudden, radiant four-alarm smile—he was one of the handsomest comedians who ever lived, and he probably wouldn't have become a clown at all if he hadn't stumbled into it. (In fact, what happens to a romantic who stumbles into clowning became more or less his subject.) Right from the beginning, he never missed an opportunity for grace—not comic, reverse-spin grace, either, but plain old-fashioned grace, evident in the improbable perfection with which his character roller-skates, eats, dances. (Alistair Cooke, whose memoir of Chaplin in his book "Six Men" is still the most vivid portrait of him, recalled the sheer pleasure of watching him eat a stack of pancakes thirty years after it happened.) The sexual magnetism of a leading man combined with the self-deprecating manners of a comedian—it's a formula that worked for Cary Grant, and later for Tom Hanks. But Chaplin invented it.

His early style was wonderfully fresh, too, and not because it was a "natural" style but because the stylizations it depended on weren't the customary stylizations of the clown. Chaplin loved the bravura clichés of nineteenth-century ham acting—the grand manner of his actor heroes, Irving and Booth and Tree. They were second nature; he had been absorbing them since he was six, and for him they were what acting was. (In his autobiography, written after a lifetime of seeing everyone from Duse to Brando, he picks out for high honors three Victorian actors in three Victorian melodramas: Irving in "The Bells," Tree in "Svengali," and someone named Martin Harvey in something called "A Cigarette Maker's Romance.") But he didn't play the manner straight. His comic style depended on taking the grandiloquent, rhetorical gestures and using them to describe an unheroic life. In a seemingly straightforward set piece, like the rescue from the orphanage van, in "The Kid," what is startling is how much life Chaplin gets out of the Victorian clichés by adding a stumble here and a flat-footed skid there, and by making them part of a beautifully orchestrated pattern of assertion and withdrawal, a pattern possible only, perhaps, in a medium as fluid as the movies. He plays most of the rescue sequence away from the camera: looking down as he scuttles across the roofs to keep up with the van on the street below; burying his head in the little boy's face as he kisses him after he rescues him; and, most memorably, playing with his back turned to the camera for the entire climax of the chase, as, in a moment of surprised triumph, he frightens off the orphanage keeper with a ferocious shake of his shoulders and feet. This self-effacement gives a greater presence to the high-ham moments, which must have come right out of "A Cigarette Maker's Romance"—his unforgettable agonized face, for instance, as he realizes that they are taking the kid away. Chaplin wasn't a clown who wanted to play Hamlet. He was a clown who played Hamlet all along, in another costume.

To James Agee's generation, that of the forties, this combination of high and low made Chaplin a god, the perfect modern artist: funny, ambitious, serious, and, above all, humane. To the post-Kaelites now in power, he is everything bad: too arty, too sentimental, too theatrical, too genteel. A revisionist biography was bound to arrive. Yet, even if that was the only kind of biography left to write, Milton's is particularly narrow. She wants to revise a part of the record that most people have forgotten exists. To explain Chaplin's perfectionism, she announces flatly that he suffered from a form of manic depression or bipolar illness. After recounting the frenzied, inspired twelve months of work that produced "The Gold Rush," she comments that "another name for what he was going through would be hypomania, a mood disorder sometimes characterized by increased creativity and goal-directed behavior." But, with the help of the Freedom of Information Act, she is mostly concerned with making it clear that Chaplin's ejection from America in the McCarthy period was, if not exactly deserved, then at least not the act of political persecution that Chaplin and his authoritative, meticulous biographer David Robinson would like to make it. Milton, who, with Ronald Radosh, wrote the sad, convincing 1983 "Rosenberg File," demonstrating that the Rosenbergs really were spies, is out to put Chaplin in more or less the same dock: he was a Red, and he had it coming to him.

The sexual scandals that Chaplin kept getting caught up in helped feed the notion that he was dangerous, and preceded his political troubles in the forties, a time when a close relation between the Sex Fiend and the Red was taken for granted. Chaplin's sexual exploits occupy the second third of Milton's book. Though Chaplin is most famous for chasing young girls, he seems to have nailed pretty much everything in skirts, without prejudice. (His trouble was that he was always getting his girlfriends pregnant, apparently managing to persuade them that he couldn't use a condom, because as a child he had been traumatized by rubber.) The list of his conquests, as Milton works it out—in his autobiography Chaplin was gallantly discreet—includes Pola Negri, Louise Brooks, Marion Davies (who was also sleeping with William Randolph Hearst), and most of his leading ladies. (Milton, while chronicling all this activity, explains, inevitably, that he was probably homosexual.)

Chaplin's politics are Milton's preoccupation, however, and, where Richard Attenborough's "Chaplin" and Robinson's biography followed Chaplin himself in suggesting that he was a warm-hearted liberal who was persecuted by a paranoid F.B.I., Milton makes a reasonably convincing case that he *was* a Red—or, at least, a good example of what used to be meant by the phrase "fellow-traveller." He probably recut the end of "Modern Times" at Party orders, for instance, and the last, incoherent speech in "The Great Dictator" was at least partly fashioned by a Party sympathizer and Chaplin mentor named Rob Wagner.

Reading Milton, though, you would have no idea of just how many people in Hollywood, and in New York and London and Paris, for that matter, had been seduced by Communism—or that, of all the people who were, Chaplin was among the most resistant to the corruption of his art. As Milton herself admits, he was of practically no use to the Party. "The Great Dictator" couldn't even be shown in Russia, because, whatever Chaplin says at the end, its satiric target is obviously the grandiosity of all tyrants. In general, Chaplin's Communist mentors found him an exasperating pupil. They kept trying to teach him that it was all about class, and he kept telling them that what mattered was pluck. Eventually, they gave up.

And surely there is still a distinction to be made between those who were drawn to an evil ideology because it justified their own worst instincts and those whose best instincts made them vulnerable to an evil ideology. It is hardly fair to crucify Charlie Chaplin for not seeing what was invisible to Edmund Wilson, too. In fact, the sad part is that Chaplin became a radical only because he thought it would make him look like an intellectual. His Communism was probably the one significant thing in his life that had nothing to do with his early trauma. It was pure social climbing, a way of getting up there with the highbrows.

Milton, having arraigned her subject as a chauvinist pig and a Stalinist lackey, suggests that these two things were what led to the decline in his work around the time of "Monsieur Verdoux" (1947). But a great performer doesn't work from ideas, he works from his body and soul, and if there is a decline in Chaplin's work it is for a simpler reason. He started so early that when he was mature he looked middle-aged. Even by the time of "The Gold Rush," in 1925, he is looking a bit weary; and in "City Lights" (1931) he is clearly a graying tramp. The snap and crackle of nervous energy that fill the Tramp's moments have, like Astaire's drumming and toe-tapping, hardened into mannerism; his mouth keeps scrunching up to one side, mechanically—a tic that in "Monsieur Verdoux" he worked to death. Chaplin's character, perhaps uniquely among great comic inventions, is, crucially, young: "As I Walked Out One Morning" is his theme. Whereas W. C. Fields and Groucho were old and knowing even when they were young, the Tramp is a youth, almost a kid.

It is this connection to childhood that will probably guarantee Chaplin's immortality. Although his highbrow reputation has faded, he remains magnetic to the innocent moviegoer. There is at least one young movie lover at large who has been watching Chaplin's early films, on a kind of continual-screening basis, since he was a year and a half old. He can't understand a lot of the humor, of course, but he is mesmerized by the emotional structure. Every moment in Chaplin is propelled by a human insight that has been given the form of a joke, and every joke drives the story forward. The stories are not narrative lines that string the gags together; they have the urgent intensity of fairy tales, and their subjects are the permanent ones: the need to be accepted, the bond between parent and child, unrequited love, pleasure in small objects and domestic routine.

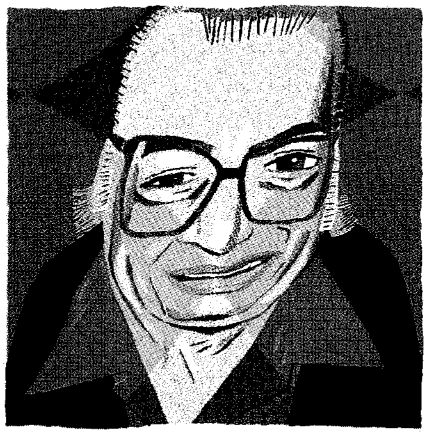
Though at the end Chaplin became awkwardly self-conscious, his greatest moments are played not for the camera but for himself—or for a childhood audience, an audience of one. The original beginning of "City Lights" is one of the loveliest and least known of these moments. It appears in Kevin Brownlow and David Gill's wonderful documentary, "Unknown Chaplin"—seven sustained minutes of solo comedy in which nothing happens. Chaplin is standing on a subway grating in front of a department-store window, and he idly begins pushing a little piece of wood through one of the holes in the grate with his cane. It won't quite go—keeps sticking. He tries pushing down on one end. Nothing doing—it keeps sticking, holding fast, popping up. He walks a bit, tries the other end with his cane. Still no luck. Then (frowning a little, pushing back his derby, putting his feet in first position) he tries with his shoe. By now, this business has gone from an idle recreation to a hobby and on to a quest. An officious fat woman straddles the piece of wood while she looks in the window; Chaplin is so absorbed in his job that he pushes his foot between her legs—wood won't fall. A window dresser working in the window begins to shout advice—"Push it in the middle!"—and eventually a crowd gathers around the oblivious Tramp, until a policeman appears, drawn by the crowd, and takes him by the shoulder. Chaplin protests his innocence, just touching the bit of wood with his cane to show the problem, and at that moment it silently and smugly vanishes through the grating, all by itself.

Nothing happens: there is none of the abstract development that we associate with great silent comedy. This is just behavior, for its own sake. And a child's behavior, too, not in the sentimental sense of being filled with "wonder" but in the real, practical sense of suggesting the way that all of life—waking up, having breakfast, eating soup, strolling—can be broken down into jobs. Like a child, Chaplin never works but is always busy. Pushing the bit of wood through the grating, eating the shoe in "The Gold Rush," taking apart the clock in "The Pawnshop," even eating beans in "The Immigrant" ("Wow, that one's hot. *Wow*, that one is, too!") display a happy child's absorption in the business of living, in the difficulty and the importance of just putting one foot in front of the other. ♦

DON YAWN

The man who made the Mafia is back.

BY ANTHONY LANE



Mario Puzo

MARK ULRIKSEN

WHEN I first caught sight of a book called "The Last Don" (Random House; $25.95), I thought, Great! A new biography of A. E. Housman! No such luck. One glance at the author's name and I knew that we were back in Mob-land, a country as drear and distant as Tolkien's Mordor. It is a place where no death goes unavenged, no blouse goes unswelled, and no wine is anything but strong and good, my friends, like the blood that is of this earth. The Don in question is Domenico Clericuzio, and you want to know how tough he is? This tough: "He never ate a mozzarella that was more than thirty minutes old." *Nome di Dio!*

Mario Puzo fans, meanwhile, will be wondering why they should have to consume a novel that feels almost thirty years out of date. When Puzo wrote "The Godfather," in 1969, he not only proved himself a dab hand at pulp style but, more influentially, fashioned a new pulp morality to go with it: a dream of pure brotherhood, of familial capitalism made frictionless by violence. It was a beautifully perverse take on postwar expansion, caught somewhere between parody and parable, and Francis Ford Coppola's film versions flattered it to the point of high art; only now, after we have endured years of cheapjack Mafia memoirs and slovenly sub-Coppola movies, has it become clear what Puzo created. He sold us a bullshit mythology, and we bought it; real-life mobsters invested so heavily in it that we couldn't tell if they were real any-

BRIEFLY NOTED

MARTIN DRESSLER: THE TALE OF AN AMERICAN DREAMER, by Steven Millhauser (Crown; $24). Millhauser's latest novel again examines the American imagination in terms of cosmology. This time, his world-creator is young Martin Dressler, an entrepreneurial wunderkind who starts out at his father's cigar store. What ensues is an expertly woven fable of Victorian Manhattan, as Martin transforms his hunger for "something else" into a series of colossal hotels. Martin's sights are firmly set on tomorrow, but he's cursed to be forever premodern: the skyscraper always seems to lurk around the next turn of the page, but he can envision only period eclecticism. As the new century dawns, Martin's crowning achievement, the Grand Cosmo, begins to look like the ultimate castle in the air, and he ponders—without regret—the consequences of having "dreamed the wrong dream."

HOUSE ARREST, by Mary Morris (Talese/Doubleday; $22.95). When Maggie Conover, a writer for Easy Rider travel guides, arrives to do an update on *la isla*, she is immediately detained: the dictator's daughter—the capricious, edgy Isabel, whom Maggie befriended on her last visit—has disappeared. Morris is extremely good at evoking exotic claustrophobia: even the songbirds have been silenced on *la isla*, where without permission flight is impossible.

AN AMERICAN REQUIEM, by James Carroll (Houghton Mifflin; $23.95). The author's father studied to be a priest but quit before taking his vows, married, and eventually became a leader of the military-intelligence community during the Vietnam War. James Carroll went his father one better: he was ordained, then devoted his career as a priest to resisting the war. But he, too, resigned the priesthood and married, and he now writes a column for the Boston *Globe*. Told with integrity and style, this is a moving account of the generational strains of the Vietnam era, and the timeless agonies of fathers and sons.

THE WARS OF THE ROSES, by Desmond Seward (Viking; $26.95). In this lively book, a historian deftly uses biography to track history through the dynastic struggles that occupied England for thirty years and in 1460-61 alone wiped out more than a third of the peerage. Seward brings perspective to past personalities, many of them grandees of almost incomprehensible thuggishness, and gives no comfort to contemporary partisans of Richard III.

CRACKS IN THE IRON CLOSET, by David Tuller (Faber & Faber; $24.95). The writer travelled to post-Communist Russia expecting to encounter brutal, Stalinist-era conditions for gay men and lesbians, and instead found a society that upended his American-bred notions of sexual categories. The resulting Baedeker gives us a patchwork of stories—from lesbians who sleep with gay men to the recurrent "Adventures of a Dacha Sex Spy." Tuller's observant reporting and personal experiences make for absorbing reading: the human comedy rendered in unexpected ways.

more; and it turns out that Puzo bought it, too. Hence his ability to continue writing sentences like this: "Certainly the Don had the vision of a civilized society, the world, as this great tree shedding the fruit that must feed and shelter society. But in the roots of this great tree would be the immortal python of the Clericuzio, sucking nourishment from a source that could never fail." Do pythons suck?

Puzo's great gift is a resplendent lack of irony; he has never kept his characters at arm's length, or asked us to do so. Even if we can't believe that the Don's hold on power is as formidable as his wisdom, we must at least pretend to be interested in which of his numerous and ghastly descendants will inherit it. "The Godfather" kicked off with a wedding; "The Last Don," breaking completely new ground, begins with a christening. The year is 1965, and a Lear-like Don is allotting future duties to his sons: Petie will go into construction, Vincent into the restaurant trade. The eldest, Giorgio, will take over from his father, although I secretly think that he will go to Beverly Hills and make perfume.

The action then jerks forward to the nineties: the two children baptized in the opening scene are grown up, and each wants to get his hands on the Clericuzio meatballs. There is Dante, the Don's grandson, who wears what is vaguely described as a "Renaissance hat." Dante's hobbies include torture and sodomy, though not, strangely enough, the exegetic texts of Thomas Aquinas. The other young blade is the Don's grandnephew Croccifixio De Lena, known to his friends as Cross. Even his name is halfway to a threat: Cross De Lena Widout Lookin' and You Getta Run Ova. Cross is a paragon of pretty well everything, apart from credibility: "He was in the full flower of youthful maleness—handsome, graceful, strong, and for his age, surprisingly courtly." Courtly? Puzo writes like an eager but not terribly imaginative fifteen-year-old student translating Chaucer. No wonder we have always accepted his portrait of the Mob as a fellowship of noble warriors; the instant-deification factor in the prose—"the sensual lips, the perfect nose, the oval eyes, all slightly hardening as if turning into the marble of ancient statues," we learn of Cross—is strong enough to make you forget that your average mafiosi run a plumbing-supplies racket in Queens, or would if they could get the car fixed.

Puzo heavies, however, are a breed apart. They not only look like statues; they couple like stallions and make entirely serious efforts to purchase Hollywood studios. At least half of "The Last Don" is set in what the Don calls "the moving picture business"; Puzo, with Academy Awards for the "Godfather" screenplays, should be an expert, but I am not convinced that his finger has remained on the pulse. Suspicion set in with the words "Because she was witty and vivacious and talented, she soon made many friends in Los Angeles." The wit in question is Claudia, Cross's sister, who has written a fifty-million-dollar "historical epic" called "Messalina," starring the lovely Athena Aquitaine. Far from brightening the plot, the Hollywood scenes only deepen the book's fustiness; did nobody at Random House have the nerve to tell the author that movies like "Messalina" went out with Elizabeth Taylor? Puzo confides that it will feature "rampant sex acts in full color," but even that is rather touching in its innocence. Color, huh? The novel's rampancy award goes to Athena and Cross, who fall in love: he sweetly proves his devotion by having her ex-husband strung from a tree and ravaged by woodland insects. How can she resist?

"The Last Don" is, as you might expect, well stocked with incidents of savagery and lust, yet they glide by without arousing much attention, let alone outrage. The clichés of Mob life—the sombre, gnomic utterances on which it is founded, and the untested belief that all levels of government and law enforcement are by definition open to its corruptive moves—are now as decrepit as the Don himself, and should be allowed to die in peace. I wasn't expecting the book to be mozzarella-fresh, but it was still depressing to come across page after page of processed cheese. The more the Don posed questions such as "Nephew, is that possible?" and "How goes your Wall Street?" the more I found myself asking in return, "Why succeeds this book?" and "Writer, will you stop?" In a way, none of this is Puzo's fault; he's just feeding us the pap that we think we want. I blame the first Don, Marlon Brando: if he hadn't inveigled us into the shadows of the Corleone soul, we would never have bothered with the Mafia. We certainly wouldn't go on buying crummy, corpulent novels about it. According to the Don himself, "Actions defined a man; words were a fart in the wind." You said it. ♦

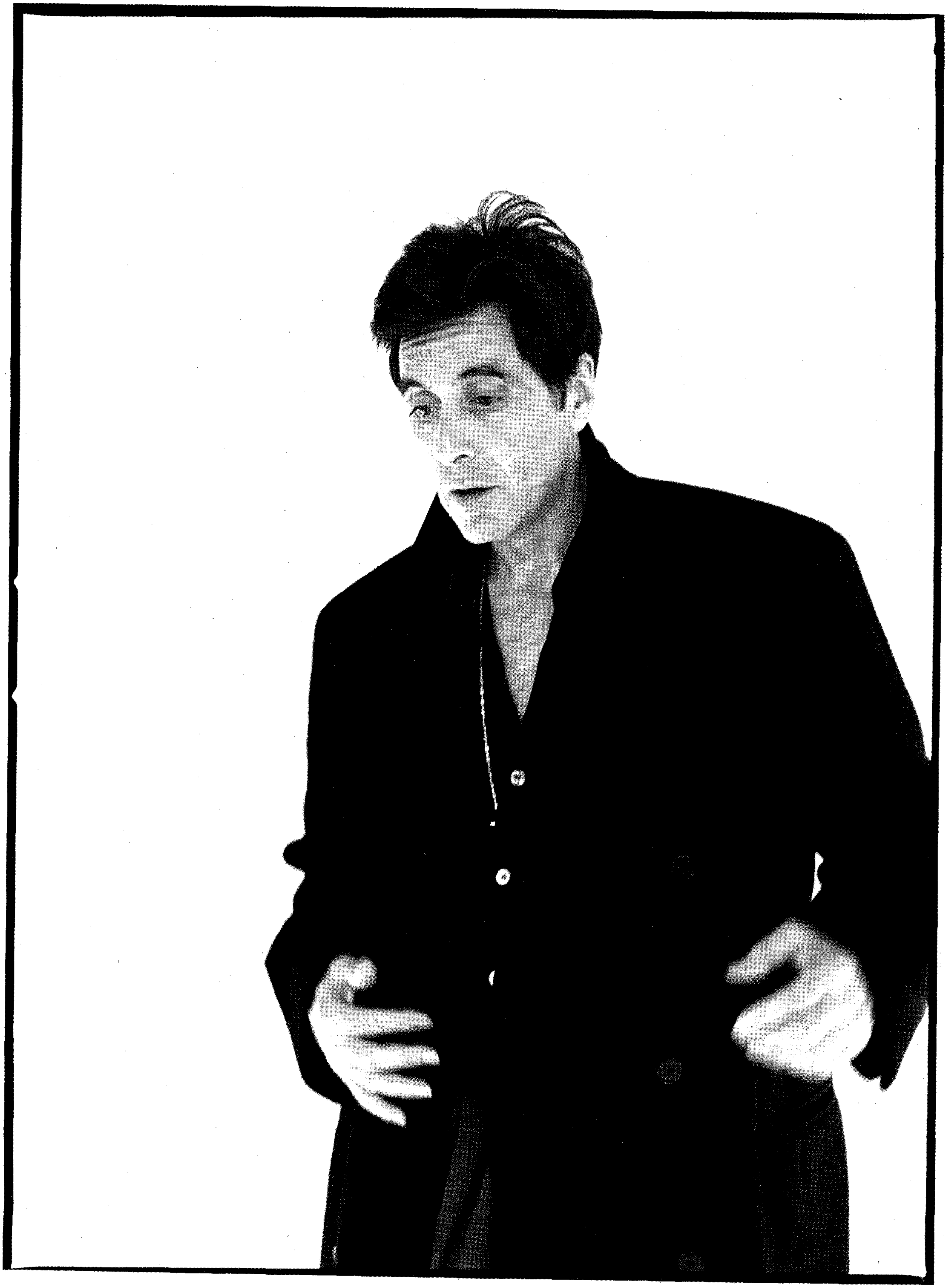
SHOWCASE BY
BRIGITTE LACOMBE

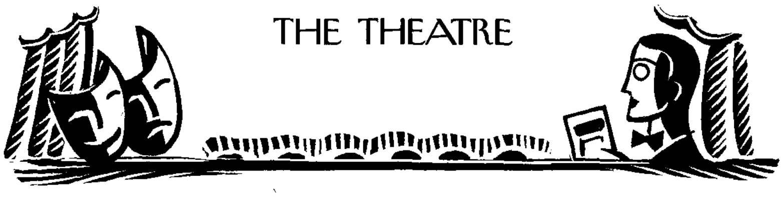
STAGE CENTER

AMERICAN movie stars love to say that their hearts remain in the theatre, even though the thought of eight performances a week, away from the kids and the controlled mayhem of a film set, fills them with anxiety. So when Al Pacino, apropos of his current gig as director and star of Eugene O'Neill's short play "Hughie," at Circle in the Square, states that he prefers stage to screen—"Film is about lines painted on the floor. The stage is a high-wire act a hundred feet up," he said recently—you wonder at his sincerity. You also measure the evidence: during the past decade, Pacino has taken time out from film for exactly one mainstage run, the fascinating double bill of "Salome" and "Chinese Coffee." And when the fifty-six-year-old actor does return to stage performance he exerts a Caesar-like control over the proceedings. It's not as if he needed reviews to cement his near-peerless stature. Yet for the sold-out "Hughie," whose ticket lines daily rival those of "Rent," he decreed that no New York reviewers be admitted until shortly before the run ends (on August 31st).

When it comes to his pet film projects, however, Pacino seems to crave feedback. He used to show "The Local Stigmatic," an unreleased movie he finished seven years ago, to almost every guy off the street, and lately he's been screening "Looking for Richard," a mixture of documentary footage and scenes from "Richard III" performed by an all-star cast. (The film will be released in October.) The Richard movie, which Pacino financed and directed, grew out of his two stabs at the Shakespeare play. Pacino's intense, Method-driven style has always shone brighter in gritty, underdog roles or in parts that draw on his Bronx Sicilian background than in period pieces or comedy. His current assignment, while hardly in the service of a great play, certainly taps his strengths. As the down-and-out Erie Smith, he spends most of O'Neill's play expostulating to the night clerk of a decrepit New York hotel, and he inhabits the stage as if he'd never known another home. —BRENDAN LEMON

Al Pacino, photographed in New York.





THE THEATRE

LAUGH TRACK

When comics get together, outrage rules.

BY JOHN LAHR

As my plane swooped out from under a cloud bank to reveal Montreal below, I put Paul Krassner's upcoming album, "We Have Ways of Making You Laugh," into my tape player and let his meditation on religion as "a rationalization of the sex urge" ease the bumpy descent. Krassner, the venerable iconoclast and editor of *The Realist*, was one of three hundred and fifty standup comedians taking part in the fourteenth annual twelve-day jamboree of zanies known to the English-speaking twenty per cent of Montreal as Just for Laughs and to the French-speaking eighty per cent as Juste Pour Rire. The event, which is lumbered with the additional title of Montreal International Comedy Festival, is one of the city's biggest seasonal attractions—a sort of Cannes of comedy. My flight touched down just as Krassner was declaring that even atheism was "an extension of the reproductive urge," and offering as proof the noisy climaxes of his own atheist girlfriends: "Ooh. Oh. No God! No God! No God!"

Saying the unacceptable is part of a comedian's job description, and the festival boffmeisters can be divided into those who want to speak their hostile minds and those who want merely to package them. Here, over the years, TV casting directors and network development panjandrums have scouted young talent, looking for comedians who have already worked up a character or have a "look" built to commercial order. Brett Butler was spotted in 1988 and Tim Allen in 1990, and two of last year's more successful acts, Greg Geraldo and Tom Rhodes, have gone prime time with their own shows this year. When two or three comedians are gathered together, there's competition and money in it. (Even a Nike marketing representative was on hand, to offer promotional trainers to those who emerged from the comedy crapshoot with a development deal.) There should also be outrage in it. In the annals of aggression, the festival has a glorious chapter or two to its credit. Not long ago, the English comic Chris Lynam became a kind of Babe Ruth of belligerence. For his finale at the festival, he dropped his pants, lit a Roman candle, stuck it in his backside, and then marched around the stage to the booming sound of Ethel Merman singing "There's No Business Like Show Business." The gesture gave new meaning to the idea of *rite de passage*.

The first week of the festival belongs mostly to the French comedians, but the second week, which is dominated by English-speaking acts, is when the industry's feeding frenzy begins. This year, the Australian comedy turn Dame Edna Everage, the sublime Dadaist invention of Barry Humphries, inaugurated the proceedings at the first of four gala programs. "I've never had a sitting ovation before," Dame Edna said to the elated crowd, parading downstage in a red-and-blue sequinned jacket trimmed with gold brocade and a red full-length skirt. Edna, a clown in the guise of a suburban housewife/superstar, is a fully formed comic creation—at once a celebration and an indictment of celebrity, who is almost single-handedly carrying the English-music-hall comic tradition into the twenty-first century. She went on to comment on the new American habit of standing ovations for comic TV-talk-show hosts. "The adulation of the unexceptional," she said. Edna's vocabulary is unusual in the timid, verbally bankrupt landscape of North American standup laughter. Her way of teasing the bilingual confusion of the divided city was to address the customers in the balcony. "I'm not going to call you paupers," she said. "I'm going to call you something slightly upmarket. Something a little French. *Les Misérables* . . ." She added, somewhat prophetically, "I'd say I'm the only non-comedian at this festival. There are other non-comedians at this festival, but I'm the only one willing to admit it."

The galas are the fizz at the top of the standup food chain; the really tasty stuff was lower down, in the smoky, cramped local clubs. At a four-hundred-seat venue called Club Soda, the kickoff after-midnight set was billed as "The Danger Zone"—which, over the next three nights, proved to be an honorary title. On the first night, nine comics performed. One after another, they charged out from the wings and grabbed the microphone: they stood, delivered, fell, and died. "Oscar Wilde once said it's very easy to compliment people you don't care about," the English comic John Malone told the audience at the end of his losing battle. "You've been fantastic." These roaring tigers, who in the greenroom talked the defiant language of comic annihilation—crushing, killing, murdering the audience—were defanged. In two hours of non-stop comic attack, the only sensational thing was the absence of thought. (One of the most successful acts, Michael Winslow, didn't even speak to the audience; he made high-tech sound effects at it.) It was as if both the comedians and the audience were becalmed by market forces. Instead of thinking against society, the comedians had joined with the chucklehead consensus: they were pandering to rather than provoking the audience.

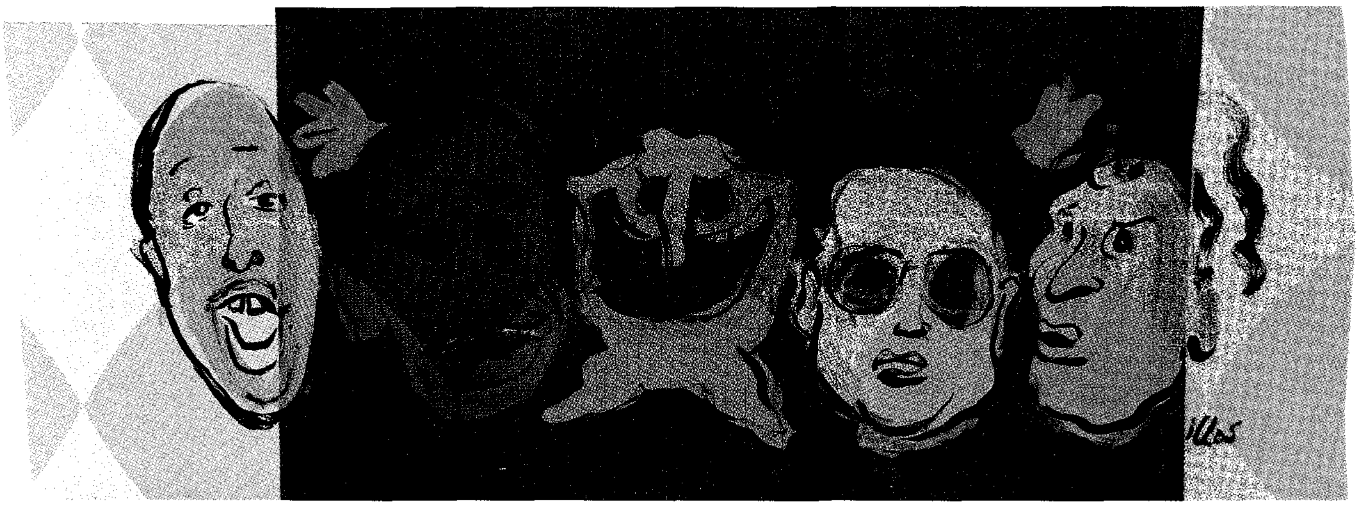
But a few standups did their job and took exhilarating liberties. Robert Schimmel, a well-dressed bald comedian, launched straight into the unsettling no man's land between sexual fantasy and sexual reality, hilariously exposing one of the public's darkest secrets—that sex is hard. "In every porno movie, there's at least one scene where they come on the girl's tits," he began one bit. "The women always love it. They're rubbing it in. Singing, and everything." He went on, "It's not like that at home. When your wife goes, 'Hey! What's the matter with you!' '*Come on, baby. Rub it in!*' 'Fuck *you!* Get it off!' " The howls and shrieks from the audience announced the accuracy of Schimmel's probes into the confusing geography of sexual desire. His rueful jokes, which he tells in a mellow voice that is gracious and not salacious, are being released this fall on the first enhanced comedy CD, "Robert Schimmel Comes

Clean," and make a scintillating spectacle of man's problematic penis and his absurd lust. "I can never understand inflatable love dolls," he says. "Because when you're horny and you want to fuck something . . . 'Honey, you gonna finish that roast-beef sandwich? Don't throw it away, 'cause, you know, I'll fuck it. There's no horseradish on there, is there?' " He adds, "I wouldn't have the patience to blow the doll up."

The lanky, cool twenty-two-year-old Dave Chappelle, a former New York street comedian who can now be seen in "The Nutty Professor," brought the African-American shock of the true into the standup shock of the blue. "You guys don't have good racism here," he told the Canadians. "You guys got to work on your shit. Ever been to Mississippi? The racism there—*mwah!*—perfect!" Chappelle, who knows that comedy is rhythm, played the audience with a kind of poetic stillness. He never pressed. When he moved, his body told a story. Nothing in his act was arbitrary, in contrast to the flop sweat of so many of the white performers. "Racism saved my life," he said. "My plane got hijacked. Didn't make the news. But everybody thought they were going to die except for me. I was the only brother on the plane. And we all know the facts. A terrorist has never taken a black hostage in the history of the world. How many of us have you seen on the news reading a fuckin' hostage letter? 'They is treatin' us good. We are chillin' and shit. I'd like to give a shout-out to Ray-Ray and Earl.' " Chappelle added, "Terrorists are smart. They know what they're doing. I hate to say it, but it's true. Black people are just bad bargaining chips. They know. Call up the White House. 'Look! We've got five black people! And . . . Hello?' "

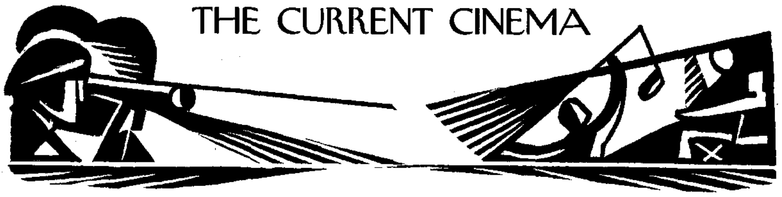
If Chappelle slayed the customers, Andy Kindler, in his "State of the Industry Address," an hour-long rant given at the hotel for the festival participants, killed the professionals. It finally put some fine comic fury on show. The subject of the Wayans brothers, who star in a half-hour black sitcom on the WB Network, sent the short, bespectacled Kindler into a sidesplitting paroxysm. "It's so racist," he said about the show. "It sets African-Americans so far back I'm thinking of starting an Underground Railroad. It would be like me coming out with a show called 'Jewy.' " He went on, "First Episode. I'm in a department store: 'I said I want the price *lowah* . . . I want the *fakaktah* price lower.' My Christian friend: 'Don't be so jewy, Jewy.' " The diatribe, which may be Kindler's art form, rounded brilliantly on the industry focus groups. "Hollywood is the only business where they make something and then run around asking people what they think," Kindler said. "Einstein didn't go around saying, 'I got $E=mc^2$, but, hey, that could be changed.' "

THE standup's universe is about seven minutes long; in walking the tightrope between fun and ferment, these small increments of time can seem like an eternity. "C'mon, people," said one struggling merry-andrew. "There are only four more minutes, and then you can forget me." But the genuine comic wants to be remembered by heart. His struggle is to give anger a shape and to make the moment memorable, a drama of mastery that takes place right under the public's nose. A twenty-minute retrospective of never-before-seen clips of the late Bill Hicks, called "The Revelation Continues," bore witness to the comedian's battle to make unacceptable ideas irresistible, and reminded viewers that the best comedians are the unelected legislators of their time. Hicks, a cunning comedian who wasn't the least bit interested in getting a sitcom, came to his fame through the Montreal festival; he died of pancreatic cancer at the age of thirty-two, in 1994. In one documentary fragment, he is shown in a London pub taking issue with a dim British lady journalist who insists that comedy is about entertainment, not thought. "Gee," Hicks said. "Where do you go to think? I'll meet you there." Hicks himself made a habit of thinking onstage, and was probably a genius at his trade. In one of his last gigs, in Australia, he talked about President Clinton and his retaliation against Baghdad for the "alleged failed assassination attempt on George Bush." Hicks said, "We lost twenty-two three-million-dollar-apiece cruise missiles killing six innocent people. You know what we should've done? We should've embarrassed the Iraqis. *We* should have assassinated Bush, and said, 'That's how you do it, Towel Head! Don't fuck with us.' And see, if Bush had been the one who died, there'd have been no loss of innocent life." Even in outtakes, Hicks is funnier than any of his wacky living breed. ◆



Standout standups at the Cannes of comedy: Robert Schimmel, Dave Chappelle, Andy Kindler, and Paul Krassner.

DEMETRIOS PSILLOS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

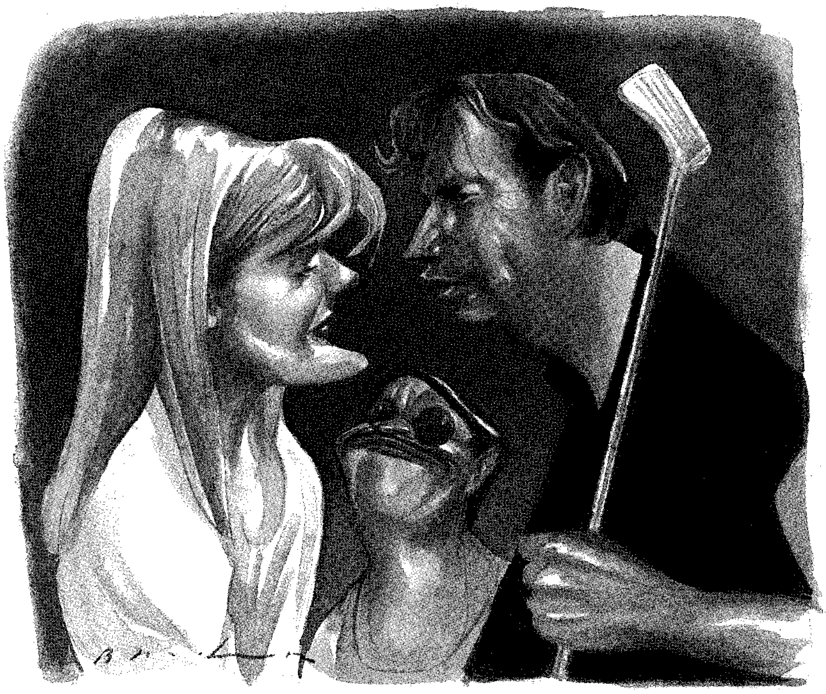
WINNING SHOTS

Kevin Costner and Ron Shelton take another swing at romantic comedy.

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

The writer and director Ron Shelton, whose 1988 baseball classic "Bull Durham" was dedicated to the proposition that sports and sex are pretty much the same thing, puts his thesis to the sternest test imaginable in his new picture, "Tin Cup" (opening on August 16th): he has set himself the task of making a romantic comedy about golf. He and his co-screenwriter, John Norville, astutely recognize that the first step in this daunting project must be to strip the sport of the corporate Republican veneer that disguises its true nature, and they immediately let us know that the game they're playing isn't a country-club tournament. "Tin Cup" shoots at the pin from a rocky lie somewhere near the out-of-bounds markers: it begins with images of a desolate West Texas landscape, inhabited, apparently, only by a slow-moving armadillo and a bunch of barely more animated middle-aged men hanging out at a seedy driving range run by Roy (Tin Cup) McAvoy, played by Kevin Costner. Mostly, these guys sweat, drink, and dream up inane bets; Roy, who seems a little less patient with such diversions than the others do, occasionally ambles over to a tee and takes a few sweet, lazy swings. The purity of his shots contradicts his air of indifference: he may be bored, but he hasn't yet lost the impulse to draw these graceful arcs in the sky—to launch a ball from the middle of nowhere to the middle of nowhere just for the joy of watching it fly.

Once "Tin Cup" has shown us the layout of its course—flat but challenging, like a windswept Scottish links or the bare stage of a Beckett play—Shelton and Norville get down to the important business of giving the indolent hero an incentive to try to conquer it. That incentive turns up quickly, in the form of Molly Griswold (Rene Russo), a psychotherapist with long legs and a sharp wit. When she arrives for her first golf lesson, Roy is energized, and his worn nuggets of instructional wisdom suddenly glitter with double entendre. "Tempo is everything," he declares, suggestively. "Perfection is unattainable." Later, he tries to persuade her that golf is about "trust and touch and letting go." Molly, however, isn't dazzled by Roy's seductive rhetoric. He suggests that he has never fulfilled his potential (he was a golf star in college) because he's "chock-full of inner demons"; she counterproposes that he's "chock-full of bullshit." He finds her resistance charming, and when he discovers that her boyfriend is his old nemesis David Simms (Don Johnson)—now a smug, successful touring pro—his attraction turns into a steely determination: she's as alluring as a tiny green protected by water and yawning bunkers. The hero, whose professional failure is a direct consequence of his inability to play safe, decides that the way to impress Molly is to qualify for the U.S. Open and win it.



The course of true love: Rene Russo, Cheech Marin, and Kevin Costner.

STEVE BRODNER

Although this sounds like the setup for a "Rocky"-like sports fairy tale, in which an overachieving little guy finds love, fame, and self-esteem by daring to follow his dream, Shelton is, as usual, up to something different. As a former professional athlete himself, he understands that failure is more common than success, and much more interesting, besides. The humor of "Tin Cup" derives from the peculiar, tortuous psychology of the *under*-achiever: the gifted athlete who refuses to believe he needs anything more than his natural talent, and ends up not as a star but as, at best, a local legend. Shelton also knows that there isn't necessarily anything wrong with being a big fish in a small pond—or, in this case, a big armadillo on a lonely Texas road—as long as you're still capable of enjoying the game. (Shelton's 1994 "Cobb," a brilliant biography of one of baseball's all-time greats, illustrates the tragic converse: it's the story of an athlete whose will to win is so fierce that it precludes the possibility of simple pleasure.) Contrary to Hollywood feel-goodism, following the dream isn't often ennobling. And it rarely allows for much in the way of romance: the heroine's role in these stories generally consists of stroking the hero's male ego as he strives for the prize.

In "Tin Cup," however, the heroine *is* the prize, and it's both touching and funny that Roy should rouse himself from the cozy stupor of underachievement just to prove himself worthy of her. His path to the Open is, of course, an erratic one, but his go-for-it romantic style is surprisingly effective with Molly, who is unused to being gone for so recklessly. Costner and Russo work together beautifully in "Tin Cup," sparring energetically but tenderly, and then falling into each other's arms with radiant relief—the satisfaction of experiencing something that feels exactly as it should feel, and the even greater satisfaction of knowing that they can recapture the sensation anytime they want to. In their first lesson, Roy described to Molly the thrill that a good golf shot gave him as a tuning fork ringing in his loins. When "Tin Cup" finally gets its hero and heroine in the sack, you realize that Shelton's erotic metaphors cut both ways. They make golf seem sexier and make sex seem smooth and effortless: once you've found the groove, every shot lands perfectly.

Tempo is everything. "Tin Cup" has a relaxed, strolling rhythm that's able to accommodate a wide variety of acting styles, from the speedy wisecracking of Cheech Marin (who plays Roy's frequently exasperated coach, caddy, and Winnebago-mate) to the self-mocking narcissistic languor of Don Johnson. Russo, as the movie's sanest character, bears the burden of providing comic reactions to the men's foolishness; she's terrific at it. And the movie's nonchalant rhythm suits Costner to a T. All the obvious tension that immobilizes his features in action-hero roles seems to have melted away here, as if the hot Texas sun had sweated it out of him. Shelton, who got a great performance out of Costner in "Bull Durham," recognizes that the actor's most appealing quality is a kind of arrested-adolescent ingenuousness, a slightly goofy innocence. When Costner is as loose as he is in "Tin Cup," he's a surprisingly original comic actor: here he plays the role he *didn't* play in "Bull Durham"—he's a middle-aged version of the undisciplined "natural" played by Tim Robbins in that picture—and pulls it off superbly. In the last scene, he turns to Russo and asks "You think I learned anything?" and his look of puzzlement is genuine, and hilarious. As always in Shelton's pictures, the lessons of sports and of love are highly ambiguous. This movie is an exuberant celebration of both the pleasures and the pitfalls of going for broke: perfection may not be attainable, but that's no reason to deny yourself the fun of aiming for it. "Tin Cup" digs the romantic comedy out of the deep rough it's been buried in, and lands it within tap-in distance of the hole. ♦

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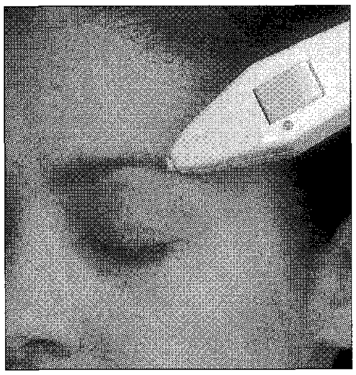
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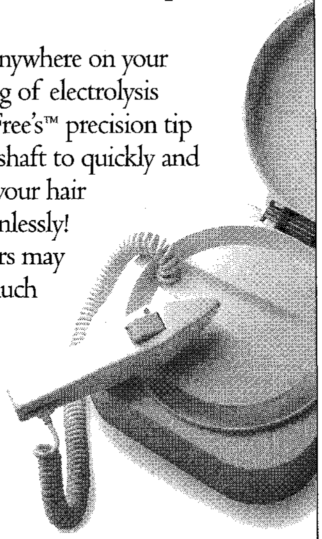

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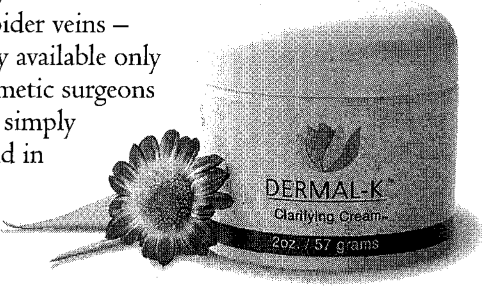

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EASY RIDER

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

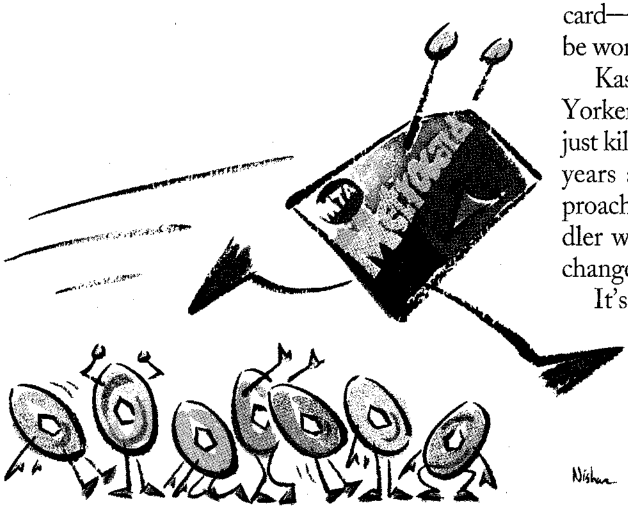
I MANAGED to avoid using the word "empowerment" for a long time, but then I got a MetroCard. In the days before I had a MetroCard—the days when I was still buying my subway tokens one or two at a time—I was under the impression that I'd avoided using the word "empowerment" because it had the sniff of a buzzword about it. In fact, I simply hadn't understood what empowerment was all about.

I found out. With my MetroCard, I no longer required daily transactions with the person at the token booth who liked to count his dollar bills slowly while I was waiting at the window and a train was just about to pull out of the station—the person who, now that I think of it, was showing me that he was the one who was empowered.

Instead, I'd walk right through the turnstiles, swiping my MetroCard through the assigned slot without breaking my stride. A readout on the turnstiles told me how much had been deducted for my fare and how much remained on my card. When I felt the need—usually when I'd just got off a train, and there was no one waiting for tokens, and the person at the token booth looked as if he'd be grateful for company—I'd go over and ask to have my card engorged with more money.

If I had any doubt about whether my card was in need of engorgement, I'd swipe it through a little machine at the station which gave me a readout. Sometimes I'd do that even if I was pretty sure of what I had. Sometimes I'd do it even if I just happened to be walking past a subway station and had no intention of going anywhere on the subway.

Usually, the machine indicated that my card was substantially engorged. It was empowering to know that if, by chance, I found myself walking toward Fifth Avenue on a hot day from somewhere near the East River—unable to find a taxi, not to speak of an air-conditioned taxi whose driver would not curse at me in a language I don't understand—I could jump on a passing bus without worrying about whether I had exact change. I had my MetroCard.



Why don't other people feel similarly empowered? I ask that question because, two years after the introduction of MetroCards, they are used by less than eight per cent of the transit system's riders. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority commissioned some focus groups on the subject of MetroCard rejection, and last week the *Daily News*, having got hold of the results, ran a story headlined "RIDERS RIP MTA CARD-ASTROPHE." Complaints about the MetroCard were so varied and unconnected that I think they could be fairly summarized as unfocussed.

I got the impression that the real reason for MetroCard rejection wasn't mentioned, but I have no idea what it is. I've lived in Manhattan since the early sixties—I usually refer to myself as a "resident out-of-towner"—but sometimes I think I don't understand New Yorkers very well. They have strange ways.

When I asked my Wall Street friend, the one I call Martin J. Kashfleau, about MetroCards, he said New Yorkers don't want their money tied up in a card. "That eight or ten dollars you've got in your card—that's eight or ten dollars that could be working for you," he explained.

Kashfleau could be right. A lot of New Yorkers give the impression that they are just killing time until they hit it rich. Some years ago, I myself reported being approached on Sixth Avenue by a panhandler who said, "Could you spare a little change? I'd like to buy some junk bonds."

It's also possible that subway riders have found some other use for a pocketful of tokens. New Yorkers are, after all, famously inventive at searching out angles. That's one of their strange ways. Could it be, for instance, that a dollar-and-a-half subway token satisfies a toll machine on some four-dollar bridge that leads to some place out-of-towners don't know about? Could it be that there's some game the natives play with subway tokens—a complicated game, like the coin-matching game that small-town businessmen play to see who's going to pick up the check for the morning coffee-and-gossip gathering?

The game would have to be complicated, because there are things real New Yorkers don't want out-of-towners to understand, no matter how long they have been in residence—some of the trickier subway routes involving the B.M.T. line, for instance. I think of that every time I use my MetroCard. It makes me feel, well, unempowered. ♦

NISHAN AKGULIAN

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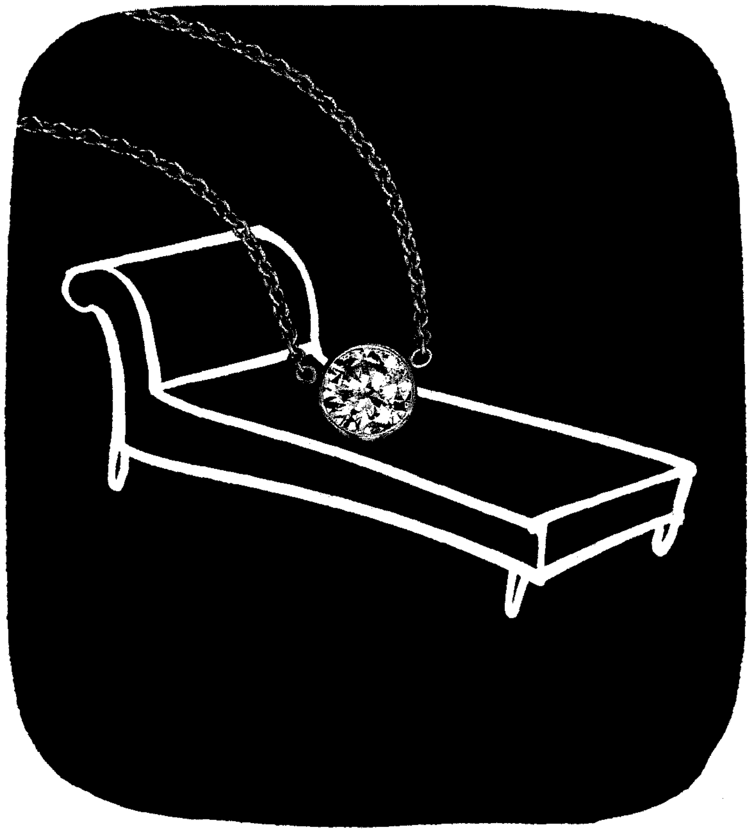

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